

# Spiritual Advocate

## John 14:23-29

Dear friends, I bring you grace and peace from God our Father, from the Lord Jesus Christ, and from your advocate and friend, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to them:

“I am going away, and I am coming to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

*John 14:28-29*

And let's pray:

Holy Spirit, thank you for reminding the disciples of all that Jesus said and did before he was taken up and removed from their sight. Thank you that you used those first witnesses to bring to us your Word, and that you have promised to speak to us through your Word, to teach us and remind us about you — even today. Speak now, Lord, and give us ears to hear. Amen.

Now, this is a picture of the tomb of Lenin in central Moscow. Have you been there and seen it? For 75 years, the body of the founder of the Soviet Communist system, Vladimir Illyich Ulianov, whose party code name was Lenin, lay preserved in this building, which lies at the very heart, soul, and centre of Moscow. It's right next to the Kremlin. St Basil's Cathedral, an important symbol of the Russian Orthodox Church, is close by. And for over half a century this Mausoleum was a place of quasi-religious pilgrimage for millions.



Why was Lenin's body preserved for public viewing like this? And why is it still preserved today? It is my understanding that within the Russian Orthodox tradition, there is a popular belief that the bodies of saints are incorruptible and don't decay after death. I don't know if that is an official teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church — but if that's a popular belief, it would seem to follow that the Russian Soviet Communist leaders aimed to use this popular belief, and to use Lenin's preserved body to maintain their status and power.

Lenin's tomb did become a place of pilgrimage almost immediately after his death. They even established a government department: the 'Commission for the Immortalisation of the Memory of Lenin', which had the job of preserving the body and preventing it from decaying. The Party justified actions through the so-called "spirit and worship of Lenin"... decisions would be declared 'in the name of Lenin' and followers would recite, 'Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live.'

Sound familiar?

After 75 years it all came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet system; and yet the grandson of [Vladimir] Lenin's cook — a gentleman named Vladimir Putin — would seem to seek to reclaim the glory days of the Soviet empire, wouldn't he? And that's not turning out well for anybody.

It's pretty macabre, isn't it? And let's face it, downright creepy. The Communist authorities took the dead body of their leader and tried to give him a kind of eternal life by preserving his corpse. I wonder if Lenin spoke much to his followers about his death before it happened? What this some kind of plan? I've got no idea. What I *do* know, dear friends, what I'm sure of, is that Jesus spoke very clearly to his followers before *his* death and resurrection — he was very intentional, and careful, and clear, about preparing them for what was about to happen.

There are a couple of places in the Gospels where there's a pivotal moment where Jesus began to very clearly explain that he was going to go up to Jerusalem, be betrayed, would be executed in that abominable way on the cross by his enemies — and on the third day, he would rise again. Now, the disciples didn't get it at the time; but they got it later.

In John's gospel, there is a lot recorded about Jesus talking about his going away and his returning. So John's gospel has this theme, this teaching if you like, starting about chapter's 13 through 17 in John's gospel — marvellous chapters — this, by the way, was Luther's favourite book, and this was Luther's favourite section of this book. So I encourage you at home to read this marvellous account of his last hours, the night when Jesus was betrayed, the final meal when he gets up from the meal and then washes their feet; and then when he teaches them many things.

I want to address just two themes in this sermon. He's not leaving them without hope; he's not leaving them even without peace and joy, although he is clear about the terrible event that is about to take place. So the first theme is about:

I. **The 'going away' and the 'coming to you again' language.** Here are a few of the key verses across those chapters that embody this language, and Jesus reassures and comforts his disciples:

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."

*John 13:33*

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

*John 14:1-3*

Can you hear the joy in my voice? We preachers get to preach on that text for funerals, but quite rarely on a Sunday morning. What beautiful words for you, today — not just for funerals!

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."

*John 14:18-19*

And the final one:

"But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

*John 16:5*

And here is the second theme. The first theme was the going away and the coming back; and the second theme is:

2. **The promise of this person, this Advocate.**

And behind this is this marvellous word that I should have had in English rather than in Greek — the word in English is *Paraclete* — and it’s a marvellous New Testament word which can mean Counsellor, Comforter, Advocate — someone who comes along and puts his arms around you and advocates for you, even in a court of law — a Helper, a Guide, a friend.<sup>1</sup> “Unless I go away,” Jesus said, “the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”



So again, listen to this theme, the promise of the Advocate, in a few select verses.

...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor [the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit] to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of Truth.

John 14:15

When the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

John 15:26

And from today’s text, our Gospel reading that we have heard today:

The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything that I have said to you.

John 14:26

Wow. We’re soaking in the words of Jesus, aren’t we? Words which, we are told in John 12:16:

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

John 12:16

Who reminded them? “He will remind you of everything that I have said to you.”

Now, brothers and sisters in Christ, this is not just a “back then, for them, for then” message! This is a “right now, today, for you and for me” message — these words which the Holy Spirit caused to be remembered are yours and mine, in the Scriptures — the eye-witness testimonies of Jesus’ death and resurrection; this 40-day period that we’re in now, which comes to an end this Thursday, and which will be celebrated here in this church next week is when Jesus finally is removed from their sight, but he has not let them as orphans — or you! Or me! Whom has he sent, and whom do we have, and who is speaking and reminding us and teaching us, even through this poor preacher? The Holy Spirit — your Comforter, your Counsellor, your Guide.

So let’s draw a contrast of that effort by the Soviets — and other political systems have done this, too — to preserve the corpse of a dead leader and build some creepy mausoleum around his body... let’s contrast that with what the Lord of the Universe, the living risen Jesus of Nazareth has done.

For one thing, we have no way of knowing exactly where it happened back then. This picture is from a



<sup>1</sup> *Paraklētos* in Greek is an adjective formed from the verb *parakaleō*, for help. But the verb *parakaleō* has a variety of extended meanings the force of the noun in our passage. It can mean "to urge strongly, appeal, strong request for something, request, implore, entreat," then "comfort, to, speak to in a friendly manner." Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Gospel* Publishing Co. Kindle Edition.

commemorative arch that the Romans built in the first century, around 70-72 CE I think, when the Roman army went into Jerusalem, into the temple that Jesus had walked in and talked in and taught in, and they smashed it to smithereens. It was like someone razing central Melbourne — it would have the same psychological effect — and Jesus had *told* them that “not one stone will be upon another” (Mark 13:2). And they carried the precious items from the temple — phenomenal wealth — they carried it back to Rome, and they commemorated it. And Jerusalem was utterly obliterated.

So today, we can go there, and it’s only speculation as to exactly where the events happened that are recorded in the Gospels. Our Lord, the living Lord, the risen King, the one who is alive, does not want us to be locating himself back in some dusty street or some tomb.

Our human nature loves to set up mausoleums. But false gods are dead gods. And we don’t have to follow them, because we have a living God, and Saviour, and Advocate. And Christianity is not a political movement — it’s a person, a living person, Jesus, who is coming to us now. Coming to you this week, in the face of whatever death or decay or change you might see — coming to you. Yes, even in the face of a changing political guard [the previous night, the Australian election resulted in a change of governing party]; and we can joke about it, but let’s give thanks for the stability of this country and the political system that we have; and let’s pray for our new Prime Minister, even as we give thanks for the previous one.

Jesus is alive through it all.

The church is not a mausoleum. The church is *not* a mausoleum. Have you noticed how — maybe you haven’t, but I’m going to let you in on a secret — we pastors do not particularly like funeral chapels? It’s not professional jealousy — it’s because only one thing happens in a funeral chapel. A funeral. We love churches and congregations. Don’t you love this place? Don’t you love the light, and the life, and the music, and the children, and the font, and the celebrations that happen in here — weddings, yes and funerals, because the living Lord wants to embrace us even at that moment — and he does, to reassure us and give us the hope that it’s not the end. We don’t build mausoleums, dear friends, we build churches.

And Jesus locates himself — be certain about it — in his grace, he locates himself here in the church in a really precious way. And I want to say something just quickly to Eden, to Emma, to Zara, to Stella, Dwobet, and Samuel here this morning. We rejoice with you because you are coming to Communion for the first time, I believe. Well, Jesus locates himself here in this Communion supper *for you!* Wow! Through his Word, which he connects to some water in your baptism, and *this* bread and *this* wine — that’s where your Saviour is, that’s where you’ll find him — not because he’s limited, but because he wants you to have the assurance that *this is for you*, for *your* forgiveness, for *your* sins.

But, where else is Jesus? Where else is the church, we might ask? And this was the question that they asked Jesus that day. Before our Gospel reading, Judas (not Judas Iscariot) had asked Jesus about how the rest of the world would find out about him. Jesus responds immediately to Judas, how will they find out:

“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them...”

*John 14:23*

So, dear friends, Jesus is present with you, and through you, and in you.

We dare not make this beautiful building an idol. My friend, Pastor Matt Anker, who had the privilege of being involved in the St Paul’s Shepparton Lutheran Church, a beautiful new church in recent times, says we should have, we Lutherans, we should have a special ritual, a rite, called the

Rite of the Shopping Trolley for new churches. And it works like this: the Sunday after the new church is dedicated, we bring the shopping trolley in and we bash it into the wall up the front side — just take a chunk out, get it over and done with. Just like when you buy a new car — are you with me? Let's not be too precious about the building, as wonderful as it is, and as marvellous a gift of God as it is.



Where's our living Lord? He's in you, and through you, and as you go out from this place, he hasn't left you alone. He's sent you his Spirit. He's refreshing you with that Holy Spirit now, and promises to do it each day. So as you go, know that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have made their home in you; and go joyfully, and go attentively. Ask him to show you who, what encounters he has prepared for you this week. Who's it going to be that you may be able to just point them, nudge them, in one little step towards hope, towards life, towards the salvation that you know you've received.

Be encouraged! He's going on ahead of you. He's preparing the way. Because he's alive, he's risen from the dead, and he's your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. St Paul reminds us that no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Let's say it together now: Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord! In Jesus' name.

Amen.

*Video of the service including the above address: <https://youtu.be/-QHcAlrsdTY>*