



**Easter 6: North Vancouver Archdeaconry**  
**May 26, 2014**  
**The Rt. Rev. Melissa M. Skelton**

**John 14:15-21**

Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

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"Help is on the way." These were the words said to us by the 911 operator at the end of each of the many emergency calls my family members had to make during the last few months of my father's life. Such calls had become routine for my family in that towards the end of his life, my father suffered not only from dementia but from a host of other illnesses. But the fact that they had become routine did not make these calls any easier to bear. And so my mother, my sister and her husband, who were all living with or near my father, were the ones who made these calls every week or so. I, on the other hand, living eight states away, could only be there intermittently and so in the end had to make only one of those calls.

It happened in the middle of the night during one of my visits. My father had gotten up from his sleep and had begun to roam in great agitation around the house, looking for something he would never find. As we tried to get him away from the stairs and back into bed, he lurched to the left, knocking a lamp to floor which broke with a crash. He then reached down to pick part of it up, and as he did so, cut himself on the hand.

As we tried to stop the bleeding, I looked at my mother's face. It was grey and tired, frightened and helpless. I called 911 and explained the situation. After hearing again that "help was on the way," I hung up the phone. And rather than feeling relief, that someone was again coming to assist us, what I thought was this: "Yes, please send help. But the help I really need is for someone to come to this house and give us this man back, someone who will take away his illness, who will take away his dementia, and who will restore him to the husband and father that he was before.

"Help is on the way."

These are what I hear Jesus saying to the disciples in our Gospel for today. In this passage within what scholars call "The Farewell Discourse" in John, Jesus is speaking to his disciples just before his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion and his death. In our passage he tells them that even though all these terrible things will happen, though all of what they have had together will be shattered, help is on the way. That help will not come in the form of a return to the way things have been before, but instead will come in a different form: in the presence of something John calls another "Paraklete." Translated in various ways as "advocate," "comforter," or "helper," this Paraklete will bring the spirit of Jesus to them—Jesus who in John is the first Paraklete.

But what will this second Paraklete mean for them? If this second Paraklete is the Spirit of Jesus fully accessible to his followers, what will they, his followers, experience, what will they, his followers, participate in, what will they, his followers, do?

The answer, of course, lies in what the first Paraklete, that is, Jesus, is all about in John's Gospel.

Hear what one commentator says about this as revealed in the focus of the entire Gospel.

"In John Jesus uses verbs (that mean some form of love) fifty-seven times. Add to that, all of the occurrences of "friend" as well as the fact that the primary disciple in the Fourth Gospel is an unnamed character called "the beloved disciple," and we might accuse (John) of touting a single issue. And why not, for is it not the case that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life"?

The commentator goes on: "(This very) passage begins and ends with love. In v. 15 Jesus declares that if his disciples love him, they will keep his commandments. Jesus gives only a single commandment in John, and it occurs in the chapter just before ours: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one

another." (Jesus also) reiterates this in the (previous) chapter: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." We see, then, the overwhelming, repetitive, circular emphasis on love."

And so, to answer the question I posed, if the second Paraklete is the presence of the full Spirit of the first Paraklete, that is, Jesus, the second Paraklete must be about not only the experience of love but also the equipping of others in the capacity to love: to love in a way that gives of the self in an enfleshed way. It is this fleshly, self-giving love that will have the power not to restore the world to where it has been but instead to renew it, take it to a new place.

And so if this is true, if the message for us this morning is that we, you and I, have been given the power to love as Jesus did, the question for all of us in this place, a place that is a bold collaborate experiment among many faith communities, the question for us all is how and in what way the second Paraklete, the Spirit of Jesus' own love, has already come among us, has already been moving here.

As I think about this, one way to see what all of you have done here is to see it as done through the power of the second Paraklete. I say this because your collaboration has come about in part as a response to the desire to leave behind a more separate way of living as congregations and, along with this, with the loss of an earlier and more separate way of doing things. And it has also come about through real fleshly encounters with each other and the outpouring of energy, all of which have yielded not a return to the way things were but a new way forward.

But here's the rub. Even where you are is not the final destination. The path of love in the Spirit goes ever onward. God continues to make all things new through fleshly, self-giving love that comes after trouble, after a disappointment, after a loss or even after a shattering.

But I say this to you: take heart. This and only this is the way God renews our lives both as individuals and as communities. We are never peacefully led back to the way things were. We are led forward in the presence of the love of God, with the capacity for self-giving, fleshly love and with the lively vocation of enacting that love—a vocation both of responsibility and delight.

And so I'll end with a story about an enactment of love that makes a way for a new thing to happen. For me it's both a story about the love of God that yearns to make all things new and it's a story about our own capacity to do the same.

One day a child was walking down the hall of an elementary school. School was over for the day, and in his hands he had a small, brightly colored ceramic bowl, one he had made himself during art class for his mother. Now, of course, this was a special bowl, hand-made, slightly misshapen and garishly decorated, the kind of thing every parent prizes and spends years trying to figure out what to do with. The boy was excited to find his mother and give her what he had made, and so he began to run towards where she met him everyday. As he

did this, he dropped the bowl and broke it into a thousand pieces. He began to cry, and everyone tried to comfort him.

“It was just a bowl.” They said. “You can always make another one.”

But the boy was inconsolable. Finally, his mother arrived. She saw what had happened, put her arms around him and let him have his cry.

Then after a while she said, “Let's pick up all of the pieces. We'll take them home, put them together, and see what new thing we can make out of it.”

My friends, beloved in Christ, help is not on the way; help has already arrived. The love of God is here. And we, you and I, are to be the enactment of that love as God creates new things out of broken pieces.

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The commentator I reference is Jaime Clark-Soles, Associate Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology