

You have heard me say any number of times that understanding the context of a passage of scripture is extremely important. The context of what precedes the passage, the context of what follows it, these two together with the context of the book in which it appears. Lets begin with the last of the three sets of context. Our passage is from the Gospel of John. As I am sure you remember John was the last of the four gospels to be written perhaps as late as the '20's of the second century, but no earlier than the '90's of the first. John is highly different from the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are Synoptic, that is seen together with a focus on the life and ministry of Jesus from a similar viewpoint, order, and content. Ninety percent of John's Gospel is unique; it does not appear in the Synoptics.

John's Gospel is much more about theology than it is about the earthly life of Jesus. When he does tell of some episode in the earthy life it is to make a theological point. For example, early in the Gospel at the Wedding Feast at Cana in response to his mother's request to solve the shortage of wine, he says *My hour has not yet come*. But solve the shortage he does. And the Gospel writer tells us, *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him*. I have discussed with you before the fact that in John's Gospel there are seven signs about Jesus. Each of them points to Jesus' divinity. And as I have pointed out before, the prologue to the Gospel immediately points to Jesus' divinity: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the*

Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Scholars are divided whether the author of the Gospel of John writing in Ephesus sometime around the turn of the 1st to the 2nd century would have had access to the Synoptic Gospels, but all are clear that he would have had access to the oral traditions which inform the Synoptic Gospels. John's differences from the synoptics are much more about emphasis and theological impact than about disagreements.

Let us look to the context of our passage this evening within the Gospel of John. Our passage is from a portion of John called the Farewell Discourse. It relates all that Jesus said to the 11 remaining Disciples after the Last Supper on the night before the trial and crucifixion. The Farewell Discourse begins in Chapter 13 verse 31 and continues through to the end of Chapter 17. Chapter 18 begins with Jesus and the Disciples moving to the Garden. In the Discourse before our passage, Jesus issues the New Commandment: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* He foretells Peter's denial, and establishes that he is the way to the Father. Then Jesus introduces the Advocate, in Greek, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit who will be with us forever.

John is not the first to speak about the Holy Spirit. The concept of the Spirit appears in Paul's letters some 50 to 60 or even 70 years earlier. But Paul speaks of the *hagiu pneuma* or holy wind or breath, as do the Synoptic Gospels. John is the first to invest the Holy Spirit with personhood. *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. John is clearly an early architect of Trinitarian Theology – the oneness of God with the three realities in that one God. Remember John's prologue. *The Word was with God and the Word was God...The word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son.* Then a short time later John the Baptist testifies *I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.* But only in our passage this evening is the Holy Spirit referred to with the personal him. Thus we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The early church would spend the next two hundred years working on the doctrine of the Trinity. It was finally adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and further defined at the Council of Constantinople in 381. It has been essentially unchanged ever since.

It is important to understand how the Church's thinking developed out of the letters of Paul, later letter writers, and the 4 Gospels as well as multiple oral traditions. But as I often ask in these homilies on Wednesday evening, what does it mean for us today? Well the thing that strikes me most about our passage is the astonishing intimacy we are offered with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I have already quoted: *You know him [the Holy Spirit] because he abides with, and he will be in you.* Then we have: *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 then: *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. The opportunity for us is clear – all is possible if we keep the commandments. And what are those commandments? Love God and Love your neighbour as yourself – the Shema which we shall say shortly.

So what is in our way of accepting this astonishing intimacy? At least all the reasons and probably a lot more than those that give us difficulty in accepting intimacy with our fellow humans. Will I lose myself? What will I have to give up? What do they want from me? Why me? What will it cost? Will I be disappointed? Will I be left behind? Can I trust them? Am I good enough? Whenever we are beset with these kind of questions we become totally focused on the downside ignoring all the possibilities of the upside. What if it doesn't work passing up on all the possibilities if it does. But remember because we do not accept the intimacy doesn't mean it goes away; it is always there for us if we say yes.

What is the answer to all the questions? *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

Amen