

## **John 14:15-21**

'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 for ever. 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.'

I wonder what Jesus' disciples thought when he told them that they would receive the Holy Spirit. From the perspective of John's Gospel, Jesus is already telling them about the Holy Spirit before his death. I'm not sure about what they make of it. He is telling them so many things. When the Gospel writers are penning their account of Jesus, it is with all the benefit of the hindsight of the resurrection and ascension and Pentecost. They knew about the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and in the time ahead. They saw what the Holy Spirit did – they felt it in themselves – pushing them to make Jesus known. The spirit brought courage to them when they were afraid; the Spirit brought to the remembrance the words to speak, to preach. Jesus uses a wonderful word for the Holy Spirit – in Greek – parakletos – in some English bibles – paraclete. This is translated into various English words – Advocate, Counselor, Comforter. That word 'advocate' is strong. Think of times when you needed an advocate. It might have been with some legal issue. It might have been when you were in the hospital, and you needed someone to interpret what was said, and to speak up for you, so that you got the best care for your situation. In my case, when I injured my shoulder, it was my wife Mary who was a strong advocate. Jesus says to his then disciples. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will be with you forever. So not just a temporary advocate; but one who will always be with them, and I add, will be with all of Jesus' followers through all the ages, so that means you too. One that will never leave you. Jesus said to his then disciples that this Spirit already abides within them. And Jesus says the same to you – that this Spirit already abides within you – the presence of God. You were baptized into that Holy presence, taken very much into the life of the Trinity. As Christians, we make a lot of the Trinity. We confess that there are three persons in one God. And probably the Holy Spirit seems the most elusive, and hard to describe. One book about the Holy Spirit has the title – The Shy Member of the Trinity. Shy because the Spirit does not want to be known apart from the Son and the Father. Shy because the Holy Spirit makes Jesus known, pushes Jesus into the spotlight, reminds people about Jesus and who Jesus is and what Jesus says. Jesus says to his then disciples that the Advocate is the Spirit of Truth. I find that to be a powerful descriptor. Making the truth known. For the disciples, that meant

the truth that Jesus is both crucified and risen; was dead, and is alive again. Some of them would actually get to meet the risen Jesus during the 40 days before his Ascension. And it would be the Holy Spirit, the spirit of God, the spirit of truth, that would bring Jesus' presence to them, would enable and empower them to speak the truth about Jesus. Jesus says to his then disciples that he will not leave them abandoned or orphaned. It must have felt that way to them especially when he died on the cross. They were so deeply grieved. It could have felt like that to those who saw Jesus ascend, disappear from their view. But the Spirit of Truth brought the truth that Jesus was with them and was always sending them to make God known, to let people into a bigger picture of God's plans. The truth was that God was working through them even when they themselves felt weak and helpless. And no doubt sometimes they and Jesus' followers through the years felt abandoned. Like in times of natural disaster. Like in war time. Pastor Martin Rinckhart knew both. He was the Lutheran pastor of Eilenberg in Germany for 31 years in the 1600s. He endured the Thirty Years War. Soldiers took over his home, and frequently plundered his little stock of grain and household goods. But worse was to come with the plague. In 1637 the town was overcrowded with people who had fled from the country districts because of the devastation of the war. Thousands died there in that one year. Nearly all of the members of the town council died. All the other pastors of the town and the surrounding villages died. Pastor Martin did 4,000 funerals, sometimes 40 a day. And after the plague came a famine so severe that people fought over scraps. He with the mayor tried to provide as much assistance as they could. But many people who survived the plague died from a shortage of food. Then the Swedish army returned and placed a heavy taxation on the town. Pastor Martin's intercession for his people had the taxation reduced. And peace from the war was in sight when Martin died. It's interesting that what Pastor Rinckhart is best known for is the famous hymn he wrote – Now Thank We all our God. I'm thinking – how could he write such a hymn of trust and thankfulness with all that he and his people had been through? Ah – the Advocate bringing Jesus to him, filling him with the power of God to minister to so many people in such deep need. Ah- The Spirit of Truth bringing him the truth that when everything seemed hopeless, there was hope, there was love, there was ultimate safety with God. The Holy Spirit brought the truth that Jesus was already in the future, and also very much in the present. I thought of Martin Rinckhardt and the powerful hymn the Spirit inspired him to write as we experience a kind of plague, a Covid-19 pandemic, a war of sorts. There may be times when we feel abandoned. Many of us have been quite isolated. We don't get to see each other here at church. We could be thinking that God seems very silent in midst of the uncertainty caused by the Corona virus and the response to it. We are worried there may be a virus surge than is worse than what we have seen so far. There are varying narratives about the severity of the pandemic. One report stood out to me this week – of 44 members of St Peter's Lutheran Church in Manhattan in New York City who have died from the virus. Pray for that congregation and their pastor Fabian Arias. The majority Latino Lutheran congregations in New York City are all suffering high Covid counts. Many of their people do work like cleaning and food delivery, essential work that is often not well protected. This plague is severe for some. Thankfully the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, is alive and active. That Spirit abides in you. I also think that it is good to pray for an outpouring of that Spirit in these times, for our congregation, for all. I'm praying for that outpouring for you today, so that you will have hope, so that you can give witness to others of hope from God, of God who always opens up the future and invites us in that future-opening work. I have lit the Christ candle, the Easter candle on this the 36<sup>th</sup> day of Easter. The light of the risen Christ shines in our world, and in us, and into the future. This light shines for all of creation. Through this time of chaos I pray for wisdom also for better care of the earth, as well as the people. We have seen some rejuvenation of nature from

the absence of human pressure in some places. There is work to do – God’s caring work. Jesus spoke of keeping his commandments. There in the upper room he gave the command to love as he has loved, to love as he loves. Write a card. Call someone who is isolated. Tell people you are praying for them. Follow your heart that is moved by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I’m going to the hymn that Martin Rinckhart wrote – Sing it if you know it.

1. Now thank we all our God,  
with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done,  
in whom this world rejoices;  
who from our mothers' arms  
has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love,  
and still is ours today.

2. O may this bounteous God  
through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts  
and blessed peace to cheer us;  
and keep us still in grace,  
and guide us when perplexed;  
and free us from all ills,  
in this world and the next.

3. All praise and thanks to God  
the Father now be given;  
the Son, and him who reigns  
with them in highest heaven;  
the one eternal God,  
whom earth and heaven adore;  
for thus it was, is now,  
and shall be evermore.

