

The Rev. Erin Hensley
May 21, 2017
The Sixth Sunday after Easter, John 14:15-21

Walk with You

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another Advocate*,
to be *with* you forever. (John 14:16)

Jesus is not leaving on a jet plane as folksingers Peter, Paul, and Mary might sing. His bags are packed and he's ready to go, but his disciples don't think they are ready by a long shot. One of them has left the last supper to betray him, Jesus has just named that solid rock Peter will deny Jesus altogether. And then, of course, Jesus just named that his way-his way of being in the world- is truth, is life. They are better informed because they know him.¹ After all, they have been in relationship with this way of relationship for years now, but what he's saying the eve of his crucifixion doesn't make a lot of practical sense. They're afraid, they're troubled, they know that he doesn't play the game either his faith community or the powers of empire want him to play and they're going to lose him.

Jesus does not say, "There, there; everything's going to be fine." He doesn't say, "Don't worry, be happy. I'll send you an escape from the crazy." In essence, Jesus tells the first disciples "My time has come, I have to go, and you can't go there with me yet. I'll come back for you. Part of my return is you continuing to do my work, God's work, together. You will do even greater work. In fact," Jesus says, "y'all will do greater works than the works that I do, because I am going to the Father (John 14:12).

Greater works than you Jesus, really? So you're leaving us, the authorities will probably come after us next, and we are going to change water into the best wine? We are going to call our own religious community to change when worship overrides justice (John 2)? We are going to have courageous conversations about things that matter with outsiders in the light of day (John 4)? We are going to tell the lame to stand strong (John 5)? What we have together is enough for those who are hungry (John 6)? We are going to

¹ <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2016/11/20/christian>
The notion of Christians as ones who are better informed versus better is from Frederick Buechner in *Wishful Thinking* and *Beyond Words*: "Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me' (John 14:6). He didn't say that any particular ethic, doctrine, or religion was the way, the truth, and the life. He said that he was. He didn't say that it was by believing or doing anything in particular that you could 'come to the Father.' He said that it was only by him by living, participating in, being caught up by the way of life that he embodied, that was his way. Thus it is possible to be on Christ's way and with his mark upon you without ever having heard of Christ, and for that reason to be on your way to God though maybe you don't even believe in God. A Christian is one who is on the way, though not necessarily very far along it, and who has at least some dim and half-baked idea of whom to thank. A Christian isn't necessarily any nicer than anybody else. Just better informed."

tell people to stop killing, to put down their stones, and catch stones when folks refuse to put them down (John 8)?² We're going to bring light, be light, so people can see and know Truth (John 9)? We're going to revive the dead and liberate the ties that bind (John 11)? Really?

Yes. Yes. Yes; you. You will do what I commanded you. I have walked alongside you through thick and thin, through belief and unbelief, through scarcity and abundance, through homeland and enemy territory. I have been with you. I am with you. The Father who sent me will give you another companion, another encourager, another to walk beside you. Or as one Johannine scholar says, "Jesus is sending *another* paraclete, which means that everything that the Spirit will do what we have already experienced in Jesus' ministry." Everything that the Spirit will do we have already experienced in Jesus. The Advocate, the Paraclete from the Greek word *paraklatos*, the Spirit of God, like Jesus lives among us as we go about our daily travels. The Spirit goes alongside; the Advocate accompanies.

One of my favorite singer/songwriters, in addition to Peter, Paul, and Mary, of course, is Carrie Newcomer. The song "I'll Go Too" is on her album *Gathering of Spirits*. The lyrics go like this:

There were ugly things beneath my bed
I'd slip downstairs when I got scared
To the safety of dad's easy chair
That chair was like a long deep sigh
And I'd stay until he'd say, "it's time"
But he always smiles and put his hand in mine
And says, " I'll go too."
"I'll go too, I'll go too"
That's what he'd say and what he'd do
"don't go alone I'll walk with you
I'll go too."

As the story unfolds in the song, the father says the same thing when she learns how to swim, when she walks down the aisle. One April, it was his time to let her mother/his wife go, so the daughter takes his hand and says, "I know"/"I'll go too"/"I'll go too, I'll go too"/"don't go alone I'll walk with you/I'll go too."

² <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/28323940-just-mercy-a-story-of-justice-and-redemption>

The notion of stonecatchers is from Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* "At the church meeting, I spoke mostly about Walter's case, but I also reminded people that when the woman accused of adultery was brought to Jesus, he told the accusers who wanted to stone her to death, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' The woman's accusers retreated, and Jesus forgave her and urged her to sin no more. But today, our self-righteousness, our fear, and our anger have caused even the Christians to hurl stones at the people who fall down, even when we know we should forgive or show compassion. I told the congregation that we can't simply watch that happen. I told them we have to be stonecatchers."

This is the promise of the Paraclete, this is life in the Spirit, this is life together. Jesus' power does not end at the empty tomb or even at his ascension, his return to the Father. This supposed ending is actually a beginning of life in the Spirit, life without the literal, historical Jesus and at the same time, life with Jesus, life through Jesus given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that walks with so that no one walks alone.

Showing up beside someone who could use some company is no small thing. The companionship may not make the papers or the Twitter feeds and yet this other Advocate who goes with empowers us to try again, to dare greatly in everyday moments sharing some kindness for God's sake. This is how Jesus worked after all, person by person, moment by moment, step by step. The phone calls you make, the emails you send, the silence you offer, the laughter you share, the food you offer. The food you allow yourself to receive, the hand you allow to be held, the friend you allow to take something off your plate. These are the things that change the world one moment at a time. These are the things that that make up and lead to the greater things as we walk in love.

There is no companionship too small for the greater works the Church, the Body of Christ, does and will do. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we reach out in the midst of troubled hearts and anxious minds and hard times. We even allow ourselves to be found, held, known as we truly are. We say to the other, "I'll go too. Don't go alone. I'll walk with you. I'll go too." *Amen.*