

**“The Advocate”**  
**Text: John 14: 15-21**

Prayer: God of truth, open us to your words of life so we may fully understand the depth and width of your love. Amen.

In today's reading in John, Jesus knows one big truth - that he is being pursued by the powers-that-be. He knew that sooner or later he would be arrested and crucified for rocking the political, social, imperial and religious boats of his time. In his last moments, he gathered his disciples and delivered what we know as his farewell discourse. Today's text is but a snippet of that discourse - the last words of Jesus to his friends and followers whom he knows will be mourning his departure. Jesus knows that his disciples are feeling anxious and scared and he makes every effort to prepare them and affirm them, so they'll be ready to face reality when he's gone. He knew that they would find the way ahead difficult without him by their side. He's not going to leave them orphaned. Thus, there is the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which in John's Gospel is known as *parakletos*. In English, it is called *paraclete*, translated in the NRSV as the Advocate.

The word Advocate gives us mixed reviews. It could mean someone who speaks on our behalf or anyone who represents another person in court or a public champion of a just cause. Seen this way, advocates seem to make us dependent on them; they stand beside us interceding, presenting evidence, and arguing on our behalf. They make choices or decisions for us. Some of us understand this advocate as one who intercedes on our behalf, pleads our case, and seeks a favorable judgment from God.

What about looking at its meaning in a different way? What if the Advocate doesn't represent us before God, but represents God before us? I like the literal meaning of *parakletos*, which is “the one on our side.” Seen as the one on our side, the advocate becomes our journey companion or a comforter or a protector or a helper or a counselor. This advocate is one who will remind us, nag us, disturb us, challenge us or encourage us to remember that we are not alone. It is this Advocate who will come to the disciples' assistance when Jesus is gone.

In his book *Unfettered Spirit: Spiritual Gifts for the New Great Awakening*, Bob Cornwall explored this Spirit in John: *“As a helper, the Spirit empowers members of the body of Christ to serve and care for their neighbor. As a comforter, the Spirit comes alongside us, bringing hope to the hopeless and comfort to the grieving and suffering in our midst. In this idea of the Spirit serving as advocate, we see the Spirit giving witness to Jesus, putting forward Jesus’ case to humanity. The image of a counselor speaks of one who offers guidance and direction. It is just one Greek word, and yet it offers so many possibilities for us to engage one another...”*

John also calls this advocate the Spirit of Truth. Why truth? Because truth is synonymous with the person of Jesus. According to John, Jesus is the epitome of truth. He lived and preached the truth. This Spirit of Truth is a more personal, more one-on-one, “a spirit of intimacy”. It sounds like the Spirit in John is much more docile, tamed and unperturbed. But I like to believe that this Spirit of Truth is an agitator. She will not be silent when injustice is present. This Spirit of Truth will not back down when acts of compassion and peace are disturbed. Come to think of it - the Spirit as an Advocate prompts the disciples to be living witnesses and testifiers of the truth. They become truth-tellers. They shake things up. The Spirit of Truth empowers the disciples to offer disruptive, life-changing testimony that might even lead them to losing their lives. Similarly, the Spirit of Truth as a Companion will support and nurture us and, best of all, to help us make good decisions and judgement as we journey through life.

As I think of the Advocate and Spirit of Truth, I think of the families that we are celebrating today. Over the years, the meaning of family has taken a different spin. There used to be a time when a nuclear family was defined as the basic unit of a society which includes a father, a mother and children. Nowadays, we have so many family configurations and definitions. Some belong to a blended family or an extended family. Others might have single parents or solo moms or dads who look after their children. You might know someone who has 2 moms or two dads, or those raised by their grandparents. We also have couples who don’t have children and, yes, pets are always part of the family, too! What keeps a family together? What makes a family a shelter from the storm? Well, one simple answer is love. A loving family sticks together through thick or thin. Rudyard Kipling writes: *“A family shares things like dreams, hopes, possessions, memories, smiles, frowns, and gladness...A family is a clan*

*held together with the glue of love and the cement of mutual respect. When there is love and mutual respect, a family becomes a shelter from the storm, a friendly port when the waves of life become too wild. No person is ever alone who is a member of a loving family”* (from Fingertip Facts).

The church family is another kind of family to which we belong. It is like our second home where relationships are treasured and nurtured. We become siblings in faith and treat each other as kin. We encourage each other to love and offer that love to the wider community. This church family is a haven for advocacy— we become advocates for one another –making this community a safe space for learning, nurturing and growing. We are companions – walking side by side - on this journey we call life.

The advocate shows up in the midst of our grief. There is plenty for us to grieve these days. We grieve the loss of loved ones. We grieve our failing bodies due to life-threatening illnesses; we grieve the continued violence in Ukraine and Sudan and the displacement of people, particularly women and children; we grieve the ever growing list of people who are unjustly targeted, imprisoned and murdered – Blacks, Asians, Hispanic, indigenous, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQS2+; we, like the disciples are heartbroken, confused, in denial; and the Advocate nevertheless shows up right where we are in our grieving.

The advocate shows up in times of unexpected joy. A baby being baptized. Someone recovering from cancer. A successful bazaar. Birthdays and anniversaries to celebrate. Warm weather gives people the chance to enjoy the outdoors. These are some moments of joy!

And when I think of this Advocate in John, I think particularly of mothers. There are lots of wonderful mothers here today: mothers in traditional families, mothers in special circumstances, single mothers, step-mothers, pet mothers, mothers who open their homes and hearts to anyone needing a friend-regardless of whether they can give anything back. Not every woman here is a mother. By standard definition, a mother is a woman who gives birth to a child. But you can also call someone your mother if she brings you up as if you were her child. Can someone be a mother without bearing a child? The answer is Yes! You might consider yourself

a surrogate mother, a caregiver, an aunt, a sister or a single woman – you are a mother in your own right and everyone here has a mother. Mothers, as advocates, teach us many things.

\* Mothers teach us about foresight: "Make sure you wear clean underwear in case you're in an accident." \* Mothers teach us about logic: "If you fall out of that tree and break your neck, don't come crying to me." Mothers teach us about religion: "You better pray that that juice stain comes out of the carpet." \* Mothers teach us about contradictions: "Shut your mouth and eat your food." \* Mothers teach us about perseverance: "You are going to sit here until you eat every last piece of that broccoli." \* Mothers teach us about genetics: "You're just like your father."

A mother, as an advocate, has to be many things and endure many things. An unknown poet declares that a mother's love is something that is made up of a lot of deep devotion, joy, pain and sacrifice. It is endless and unselfish and it endures whatever may come. It is full of hopes, dreams, tears and pleasure.

Have you ever thought of yourself as an Advocate? Have you ever thought of yourself as the one who accompanies, journeys with, supports, protects and cares for others? What is your advocacy as a follower of Jesus? Here's something that you need to remember from the words of Rev. Mike Marsh: "Advocacy always looks like love and affirms life." Advocates cry with you in pain, laugh with you in joy, hold your hand when you're afraid, sit at the bedside of the dying, hug you when you're lonely, march with you in protest, listen to you and love you no matter what. Wherever there is love and life, the advocate is there. Let us be advocates for one another so that Jesus' words ring true to this day: "I will not leave you orphaned!" Thanks be to God. Amen.

#### Sources:

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