

The Last Word
John 14:15-21
April 27, 2008
Sixth Sunday of Easter

I've heard it said that the upheaval,
and moodiness, and arguing
of the teenage years
is so that when it comes time
for the youngling to leave home
not only can the young person hardly wait
to get out of there
the parents are just as glad to see them go.

This was very true in my family.
My parents and my brother-in-law
(I'm not sure how he got roped
into helping me move)
they drove me to the campus of Ball State Univ.
for my freshman year.
After we had unloaded my stuff into my dorm room
my parents climbed in the car
and as they pulled away
gave one last instruction
"Don't call unless it's an emergency!"

Yep-I think they were glad to see me go,
and I was glad to go as well.

When Andrew Lloyd Webber
appeared on American Idol this past week
host, Ryan Seacrest asked him
what he would title a song
for judges Paula Abdul
and Simon Cowell.
His answer,
"How can I say I miss you,
if you won't go away."

While we all have times of thinking good riddance
to a job or a relationship or a home
saying goodbye is sometimes bittersweet
and often quite difficult.

In his speech at his daughters college graduation
actor Alan Alda reflected that
"the best things said
(often) come (at the) last.
People will talk for hours saying nothing much
and then linger at the door
with words that come with a rush
from the heart".

Today we are back at the last supper.
Jesus has his hand on the doorknob
saying his goodbyes to his disciples
with some final instructions.

This is not a graduation speech.
"You've learned your lessons,
now go out there and change the world.
Call me at the office if you get into real trouble".

For a number of years
Jesus has been patiently instructing
the disciples in the particulars of his way
in the world.

Jesus has allowed them to be first-hand witnesses
to all of his signs.

Now he says, "I'll give you another
an advocate."
this advocate will be the Holy Spirit who,
is to be the same Counselor,
Comforter,
and guide
that Jesus has been
while he was with them.

He does not leave his disciples alone.
He does not expect them to find their own way
as best they can.

He tells them that this companion,
this advocate, the Holy Spirit
will abide with you and will be in you.

In other words,
they will have the same intimate,
personal connection with the Advocate
that they have enjoyed with Jesus.

There is a message for us here as well.

When Jesus calls us to follow him
he doesn't expect us
to be some kind of spiritual superhero,
faster than an usher collecting the offering,
more powerful than a trustee
with a hammer
and able to leap tall bureaucracies
in a single bound".

We don't even need to have special powers of healing,
or charismatic speaking.

Jesus just wants us to be obedient to him,
to follow him.

Just obedient.

But most of us have a hard time with being obedient.
It really is countercultural.

We are more often praised for making our own way,
marching to our own drum.

My daughter, now 11,
has always been one to speak her mind
and go her own way.

I keep telling myself that this trait will serve her well
when she is out in the big wide world-
right now I'd prefer her to be
a little more obedient!

Today's gospel depicts a life characterized
by obedience and dependence.

Jesus says that we are to obey his commands.
If we love him,
then we are to obey him.

We will keep his commandments to love one another.

Which the disciples must have wondered
how they were to manage that.
Knowing they had a hard time loving each other
even when Jesus was with them.

Now he wasn't going to be with them,
his memory would fade,
his teachings would become murky,
he wouldn't be there to head off arguments
among the disciples
about who was sitting where,
or who was line leader for the day.

What they really wanted was
to keep singing about Fairest Lord Jesus
and How Great Thou Art
and then go back to their lives
as before.
Forget this loving stuff.

But Jesus assures them
that he has a gift for them.
He didn't want the disciples
to hold up his life as memory
an old photograph they might dust off
once in awhile and feel nostalgic about,
but he wanted to be on ongoing presence
in their daily lives.
*I will not leave you orphaned.
I am coming to you.*

What a strange thing to say
on the night of betrayal and arrest.

We would expect something along the lines of
"I am leaving you. Sorry. This is how it has to be.
I'm feeling smothered.
I need some space.
We can still be friends.
Shoot me an email once in awhile
and let me know how you are doing.
Don't call unless it's an emergency."

Instead Jesus said,
*In a little while the world will no longer see me,
but you will see me.*

Jesus was calling his disciples to live and love
in ways that seemed impossible.
They couldn't do it alone,
not without the spirit.

When Jesus said, I am coming to you,
he didn't mean he would return
like an old pal from high school.

Jesus would be with believers in a different way.
Or perhaps we could say that God
would be with them in a different way
because Jesus had been there.

The eternal cosmos word of God
became flesh in Jesus.

That's what John wrote
at the very beginning of this gospel.

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

The Spirit,
which blew like a wind
over the face of the deep in creation
took on flesh in the one
who now sat with them at the table.

This living Word had just bent down
to wash the disciples dirty feet.

You can't get much more down-to-earth than that.
Jesus was very clear.
The Spirit that dwells in me
will abide also in you.

Love and spirit are at the center of these last words.

*Love one another as I have loved you
and The spirit of Truth
will abide with you
when I am gone.*

In other words,
You don't know everything yet.
You have more to learn.

The good news is this not a test
where you have to know everything in advance.
In fact all of the questions
have not even been written.

Because in every generation
we are faced with new questions
and staggering perplexities.

Does the sun revolve around the earth
or is it the other way around?
Should nuclear weapons ever be used
against an enemy?
Should homosexuals who feel called by God
be ordained to preach?

Jesus knew there were some questions
the sacred writings didn't specifically address
and that there were some things
he had never talked about.
As evangelist Tony Compolo once said,
"What did Jesus say about homosexuality?
NOTHING!"

In facing the ever-changing realities of life
the Spirit will be your tutor,
guiding you into all the truth.

Church historian, Rosemary Radford Reuther,
says there are two things the church must do.
One is to pass on the tradition
from one generation to the next.

And the second---to be open to the winds of the Spirit
by which the tradition comes alive
in every generation.

Deeper than memory....

One hand resting on the doorknob
Jesus doesn't try to deny the tough realities
of human experience.

But even in that we can hear the sound of laughter
the song of gladness
the voice of hope
because the Advocate has come to empower us
to live victoriously in this world.

The Spirit comes that we as the community of faith
can live life to the fullest.

This is not a private mystical union
solely between the believer and his or her God,
but rather
the promises of divine presence
are promises made to the community.

Jesus' promise of the help
is made to a community who lives in love.

Jesus connects our love for one another
with his own presence
or absence in our lives.

Our love for one another
demonstrates our love for Jesus.
And our failure to love one another
says much about our failure to love God.

What happens when we forsake one another
for our own self preservation
is that we have not only become orphans
we have allowed other to become orphans.

We don't ponder the works of our Lord
as distant spectators
He lives in us and we live in him.

The Advocate is the power of the resurrection today for us.
He is the life-giving breath from the cross
who never fails to make us new.

We are not orphans.
The Spirit is here.
Through Christ we have been joined
with our true source of being
and our faith is renewed.

Jesus' love does not turn aside from us
and likewise our love in Christ for the world
can save the world.

Even though through our eyes
we may behold earth and humankind broken,
evil and dying ----
we have ourselves
through faith
beheld the resurrection victory
beyond the cross.

And we find that the real power for living
and loving is in the cross
who has stepped into our orphanage
and freed us to step into
the orphanage of the world.

Lord, help us to understand your truth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, reveal to us those things that we could not have known had you not loved us enough to show them to us. for your grace that never abandons us, we are grateful.. continue to speak to us in new ways this day that we might share your love with the world.

Resources:

William Willimon. Dependents. Pulpit Resource. April, May, June, 2008.
Barbara Lundblad. I Will Not Leave You Orphaned. Day One. April 2007.