



# Lexington Presbyterian Church

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## Who Will Take Care of Us?

John 14:15-22

A sermon by William M. Klein

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15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 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. 18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 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." 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" (Jn. 14:15-22 NRSV)

1

Not so many years ago my children were small and (in some ways) life was easier...but that's another story. When they were small they were of an age that if Deb and I went out of an evening they needed a babysitter. "Where are you going?" they would ask. "Out with the Wheeler's," we'd say.

"Can we go with you?" they'd ask. "Sorry, where we're going you can't go."

"How long will you be gone?" "For a while. You'll be in bed when we get home. We'll be here when you wake up in the morning."

Then the big question. "Who will take care of us?" How we answered this question was of greatest concern to them. Any of the regular babysitters may have been ok...but if we said "Joanna," they'd shout, "YEA!" Joanna always brought crafts...she acted out plays with them...she made cookies with them. She nurtured their eager young lives - and as long as she was with them, they were not afraid for us to go out for the evening.

2

"Who will take care of us?" the disciples wondered as Jesus stood with one hand on the door that, when opened, would lead to his betrayal, trial, and execution. For three years they had walked dusty roads and played Palestine's roadhouses with Jesus, their master and friend. In that time they had shared the good and the bad. They had watched adoring and astonished faces in the crowd when he healed lepers and forgave sins. They had listened in amazement as he befuddled belligerent lawyers. They had sat at his feet while he opened the scriptures and introduced them to the God they only thought they'd known. They saw him touch the untouchable, feed the hungry, care for the outcast, and heal every kind of need. They'd seen his heart break over and over again in concern for the ways people misunderstood and misrepresented God. They had seen him transform faith from a perfunctory adherence to the law into the way, the truth, and the life.

No matter what came their way, Jesus was always there helping them, comforting and consoling them, teaching and challenging them. Through thick and thin, he had taught them so many things about God, about life, and about themselves. They didn't

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always understand what he was talking about...in fact, if the truth be known, they rarely understood what he was talking about...but that didn't matter too much to them because Jesus was close at hand. When they were in his presence there was something about him that made them think they were in the presence of God. With Jesus near, they had the feeling they could face just about anything.

To be sure, they were alarmed with Jesus' talk about going away. They loved him dearly and did not want harm to come to him. But they also wanted to know what was to happen to them in Jesus' absence. Could they still love Jesus and have access to him after he was gone? Could he still love them, comfort them, teach and challenge them?

3

Jesus anticipated the disciple's anxiety about his departure. That is why he made them two very important promises. The **first** promise was this: "I will not leave you orphaned. The Father will give you another Advocate to be with you forever."

If you hear the word "Advocate" and think "Holy Spirit" you are right. The word we have translated "Advocate" is the Greek noun *Paraclete*. It derives from a verb that, in its noun form, can mean "the one who exhorts," "the one who comforts," "the one who helps," and "the one who makes appeals on one's behalf."<sup>1</sup> I think it is safe to say the disciples would have said Jesus served precisely this function for them.

In point of fact Jesus said, "The Father will give you *another* Advocate, *another* Paraclete..." - suggesting Jesus thought of himself as a Paraclete. So the term is not simply another name for the Holy Spirit. It is also a particular way of describing God in our midst - another dimension of life in Jesus' presence. Jesus was saying there would be continuity between the promised Paraclete and his work.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Jesus was saying he would continue to be present and available to the disciples (and they to him) through the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Why would this have been so important to Jesus' disciples? Well, Jesus was telling them everything he had begun would not stop at his death...it would continue under the guidance of his Spirit.

As well, keep in mind...John's community, John's readers, living as many as 70 years after Jesus' death never would see or hear or touch the physical Jesus. Those latter-day followers naturally wondered - "What about us? We never saw Jesus with our own eyes. Can he love us, comfort us, teach and challenge us long years after his death? Is our faith only a secondhand faith? Do we have to keep our faith alive by just reading about it in a book? Do we have to live all of our lives on a thin diet of fond memories of what used to be...and spend our time wishing we had lived there and then instead of here and now?"<sup>4</sup>

John's Jesus anticipated all of this...and so said to the disciples of his own day and to disciples in our own day that by God's gift of the Paraclete, life in and through Jesus is always possible. In fact, that is God's desire. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus and the events of the resurrection available, "touchable," beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Through the Holy Spirit believers from now to kingdom-come can know the presence, comfort, and peace of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The **second** promise Jesus gave his disciples to allay their fears was this: "Because I live, you will live also."

I bet this second promise was more mind-boggling than the first. Remember, this conversation took place **before** the crucifixion. Jesus said he was going to be put to death...but either they did not believe him or they did not understand what he meant. They had no way of knowing how a dead person can be alive. And so they logically assumed that when he was dead and gone he was not also alive.

That was the first hurdle they had to get over. And they probably did not get over it until after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection...then they remembered what he had said. "So that is what he meant," they must have said to one another. "Because I live, you will live also." It made more sense looking back.

Before Jesus' death they did feel "alive" in his presence. After his death and resurrection they discovered there was a sense in which they could feel "alive" as well. And they realized what he had said was true - that because he lived beyond the grave, so would they.

I think it is crucial we understand what Jesus was and was not saying. He was not saying eternal living was automatic or natural. They would know true life in the present and beyond the grave because of Jesus...because he lived...because God made Jesus the portal that transports us into abundant life.

Their faith, our faith, is defined by how we respond to this incredible good news. Faith is our response to what God has done for us in and through Jesus. Faith is NOT our attempt to get God to do something for us. Faith is our response to the news that because Jesus lives, so do we. Your faith and mine is a grateful response to the gift of God's grace...and not an effort on our part to persuade God to love us. It is when the meaning of what God has and is doing for us through Jesus sinks in that we realize why the earliest Christians called it "good news."

Our part is to let our lives say, "thank you," - to express our gratitude by loving God with our whole heart, mind, and strength. We demonstrate the depth of our faith by committing ourselves to following Jesus' commandment to love one another. That is what Jesus meant when he told the disciples to "keep my commandments."

"**IF** you love me..." said Jesus. The clear implication is that if we really love Jesus then we love one another...and if we **do not** love one another then we don't really love him at all.

If you wonder what it means to love with Christ's love...I'm sure you know someone who, when you're in his or her presence, makes you think better thoughts, live a better life, reflect on God - become more devotional, more whole.<sup>6</sup> In his or her presence you know what love looks like and feels like. As you discipline yourself to work at loving in this way, too...you discover Jesus is with you.

Earlier in John 14, Jesus said, "I am going to prepare a dwelling place for you," and we usually think of that as a future promise, don't we? But did it ever occur to you there is a present dimension as well? Jesus wants to be with us now and always...so urges us to love him by loving one another.

In gratitude, let's be mindful of others, tell the truth, guard our tongue, and make someone else's life better, fresher, and more abundant because we left a note, made a call, and said a prayer for them. It's so easy and so difficult to do. If you obey Jesus' commandments...serve faithfully, speak truthfully, love consistently, pray every day, simplify your life, and leave everything else to God.<sup>7</sup>

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I began by implying the Holy Spirit is like a babysitter...but that is a serious underestimate. The work of Christ's Spirit isn't just taking care of us. It is God's way of being with us now and always...calling us day to day, moment to moment to life with him, which is to a life of love and wholeness and peace and joy.



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### Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> O'Day, Gail R. 1995. Luke and John. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 747. The verb form is *parakaleo*.

<sup>2</sup> O'Day, 747.

<sup>3</sup> Bartlett, David L. & Taylor, Barbara Brown, ed. 2010. Feasting on the Word. Year A, Vol. 2. Louisville: WJK Press, 493.

<sup>4</sup> Craddock, Fred B. 2001. The Cherry Log Sermons. Louisville: WJK Press, 64.

<sup>5</sup> O'Day, 748.

<sup>6</sup> Craddock, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Craddock, 65.