

Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist

John 14:15-21

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees Him nor recognizes Him. You know Him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

“I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Son the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

1. True Colors

Anyone ever have a chameleon as a pet? The chameleon is an unusual “old world” creature with independently movable eyes, a helmet head, and fused toes. It is known primarily, though, for its ability to change color on the rotation of a dime, according to its mood. The chameleon uses this ability to blend into its surroundings, to hide from predators, or to silently approach prey.

We use the word chameleon in the English language also to indicate a person who is prone to change their opinions or

behaviors simply dependent upon what situation, group, culture, or politics that person is immersed into.

Ever know someone who sides with anyone they come in contact with? Some call these people “fair weather friends.” They don’t seem to have a firm opinion of their own about anything. At least it’s impossible to tell what they really think, because they will agree with whomever they are with. Put them into a room with climate change advocates, and they will passionately advocate for climate change. In the next hour, put them into a room with climate change protestors, and before you can say “flip,” they’ve taken up a sign and have begun protesting along with their peers.

You probably also know people who do this same flip-flop when it come to their faith. Put them into a room with die-hard Christians, and they’ll take up daily prayer, worship, and join several committees. But remove them from that atmosphere and put them into a different environment, either into an anti-Christian culture or a secular situation, and they’ve adapted so well, you could never tell they’ve ever been a person of faith. Some al these people “Chameleon Christians.” They blend into every social situation and cultural milieu so will that you can never tell what they truly think or feel, or if they truly have faith in Jesus or not.

A rare breed? Not exactly. Chameleon Christians are more common than you think.

2. Companion

Have you ever tried to untangle a string of Christmas lights? It doesn't seem to matter how carefully you pack them away at the end of December, they always come out a year later in a big knotted mess. When we look at the relationships of love between disciples and teacher, parent and child, Companion/Advocate/Spirit and keepers of the commandments, they become so intertwined with each other it is difficult to separate them. Each relationship, a beautiful bright bulb, is impossibly entwined with the other "bulbs" in the strand. It is their intimate connection that brings light to the world.

Having lived into the fullness of resurrection for a season, we find ourselves eagerly anticipating Pentecost. John 14 takes us back in time to Jesus' farewell discourses as He desperately tries to prepare His disciples for the coming events. We look at this passage through the lens of a resurrected Christ about to leave again—this time not in death, but through ascension. In both of these leave-takings, the promises of Christ hold true: We will not be alone. We will not be orphaned. We are too entwined with our Creator and the love that made us to be left to our own devices.

Jesus promises another Companion. Companion is one word—others are advocate, helper—to describe the Holy Spirit. "Companion" describes someone who stands at our side when life is hard and the ground beneath us is rocky. This word sounds

much softer and more comforting than the creative, fiery, uncontrollable Spirit that rushes in on the wind at Pentecost. Perhaps that is how we move from the season of Easter to Pentecost—first with a gentle Spirit that comforts, feels, heals, encourages, and above all, loves. That love is what makes the Companion recognizable. That love is what sweeps us off our feet. That love is Jesus' first condition. It is the connection in our jumble of lights.

3. Advocate

Advocate—Helper—Comforter—Companion—all these words describe the Holy Spirit. Each has its place as we live as Christians in the world that (a) God loves so much and yet (b) rejected God's Son and often rejects those who follow Him.

Notice that Jesus promises "another advocate." Jesus is the first. The second one will continue His work by making Him alive in our hearts and experience. Which isn't to say that this life will be easy. If it were, we would need no advocate, no one to stand up for us, to encourage, comfort, and help us. Some of those hardships are part and parcel of living in a broken world where illness and war are as much the norm as health and peace. Some of those hardships come from trying to keep Jesus' commandments.

Do we believe this? I suspect that many of us tend to think that God rewards faithfulness. Sometimes acts of mercy are met with

suspicion, standing for justice is met with hostility, speaking a word of mercy is met with anger, and bearing witness to God's love it met with contempt.

Christian faith does not exempt one from the challenges—physical, emotional, or spiritual—of this world. Faith does promise help amid the challenges, comfort amid our grief, and an advocate to stand with us and for us. For we are not left alone, as orphans, but are accompanied by the Spirit of the One in whom “we live and move and have our being.”

4. **Graduates**

Today would have been graduation Sunday in the Clear lake School District. It is the time when our graduates will be going into the world. Because of COVID-19, that ceremony will not be held this year. I would like to take this time to recognize the graduates.

Peyton Lille is the daughter of Patrick and Marianne Lille. She will be attending Viterbo University in sports management and leadership along with undergraduate Pre-Law.

Brandon Pederson is the son of Josh and India Pederson. He will be going into the work force.

Ivan Ruble is the son of Steve and Sue Ruble. He will be attending UW-Eau Claire , majoring in criminal justice and playing football.

Madison Zimmer is the daughter of Bob and Rachel Zimmer. She will be attending WITC for nursing.

We also have one college graduate. Nathan Thompson is the son of Mark and Elizabeth Thompson in Deer Park. Nathan graduated from the University of Minnesota last December. His major was accounting. He has been working in the Cities—although now from home—since then.

If you can, congratulate these graduates on their achievements.

5. Doubt

There was an old saying: “The reason mountain climbers are tied together is to keep the sane ones from going home.” Whoever said that was playing with us a bit, for we know mountain climbers are tied together to keep from getting lost or going over a cliff. There’s another piece of truth here. When things get tough up on the mountain, when fear sets in, many a climber is tempted to say, “This is crazy! I’m going home.”

The life of faith can be like that—doubts set in, despair overwhelms us, and the whole notion of believing in God seems crazy. Jesus knew His disciples would have days like that. So He

told them we're tied together like branches on the vine—or like climbers tied to the rope—tied together by the Spirit, to trust in One who is always more than we can understand, to keep us moving ahead on the journey of faith, to encourage us when believing seems absurd.

6. Surprises

When Christopher Columbus was sailing to the new world his hired sailors were threatening mutiny. The voyage was long and hard and there was no land in sight for weeks. One day Columbus saw an encouraging sign. Floating on the ocean swells was a small tree branch. The branches' leaves were green, indicating that land could not be far away. The green branch gave the sailors enthusiasm and a renewed hope. Soon after its discovery, land was sighted from the sailor in the crow's nest.

When all seems hopeless God has a way of surprising us and being present, even in the loneliest places. It is not God who is absent but we who have ceased to believe in a God who loves us more than we love ourselves.

7. Bishop Jung

This week, Bishop Jung sent a message to the clergy. I would like to share some of that message with you.

Because of the Spirit, even in quarantine we are close in Spirit, in mutual care and in prayer. I frequently experience being close while physically apart in my relationship with my spouse Im. She often travels to far parts of the world, but we remain close in our loving relationship. That has taught me that it is possible to be humanly close while physically apart.

This is what we are all learning in these times: To be close in our relationships though physically apart. As Christians, the Spirit within each of us allows for a closeness otherwise out of reach. It unites us. It blesses us.

We are invited in these difficult times to focus with greater intentionality on our life in the Spirit with God. Siblings in Christ, I commend you to seek spiritual depth in these challenging times. God knows you better than you know yourself.

It is this—the Spirit sent by God—that unites us as Christians. It is not anything we do that unites us. It is not believing the same things that unites us. It is the presence of God that Jesus promised that makes us one in Christ. In other words, Christian unity is not a thing we create but a gift of God to us as the Spirit dwells within us.