

Jesus reveals God's love most perfectly

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Easter 6A –John 14.15-21

In times as disturbing as these, we don't have to look far to see how sudden, drastic changes can upend people's lives. These surprises jump out at us with no warning. It makes a big difference if we can access the inner strength to weather a sudden change. If so, then we can be inwardly prepared to accept what might come, and also offer that strength to others. This is what today's gospel is about.

So how *can* we prepare for sudden, unexpected change? The key we're offered today is to nurture deep relationships that are so filled with trust and love and hope that they help us survive anything. That's what Jesus offers us, his fellow travellers. In last week's gospel, we gathered with him and his closest disciples in the upper room. And in today's gospel, we're still there with them. This was the time when Jesus was preparing his friends for the change they'd soon face when he'd no longer be physically with them. He's telling them about the supports he'll send them.

In this resurrection season of Easter, you may wonder why our readings take us back to the time before Jesus' crucifixion. I suspect we're being given these passages to prepare *us* for the feast of Christ's Ascension ... and then for Pentecost.

Last week, we heard Jesus tell his friends he was going away. He said he'd go to prepare a place for them, then come back to take them to himself. For us, that feels like a preparation for his Ascension. But for John's community, that would have been a very raw memory. It's probably why they specifically

remembered those lovely words we heard today: ¹⁸ *I won't leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.*

Many of us know what it is to lose somebody central to our life. If we're lucky enough, and we know early that it's going to happen, in that last little bit of time we have together, often our loved ones do what they can to prepare us for life without them. They can never prepare us enough. Yet, something *they* can't control does happen. Something of them stays in us quite tangibly. We often find ourselves having an inner conversation with them when we're faced with big decisions. I think this experience is a tiny echo of what we heard Jesus promise today. *The Father will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever ... the Spirit of Truth whom ... the world neither sees nor knows, [but] you know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.* Hear Jesus say that Spirit *already* lives in them!

The disciples in the upper room are soon going to lose Jesus. When that dawns on them, they may feel like fledglings not yet ready to leave the nest; inadequate; scared. But we just heard Jesus tell us the Spirit of Truth lives within them/us now.

So there's no reason to fear; they'll be alright. And that's because it all hinges on the one thing that comes most easily to them. *If you love me ...* says Jesus. It's not a condition they must attain. *Of course* they love him! This is not a question he's asking them. It's a statement of fact, with its logical consequence. Better said, *Given that you all love me, you'll love each other too, as I've loved you.* So there's nothing to fear.

But how's that meant to help? The love is what makes it hurt so much in the first place! How are we meant to do that? His answer is *Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Love one another as I have loved you.* How's anyone who's grieving and feeling left behind going to find

the strength to love – to bear witness to Jesus?

How? Well how did Jesus love them? The foot washing shows us. Put yourself out for your neighbour; not just for your family; not just for those you're obliged to serve. It's much wider than that. Do it randomly, like Jesus did. Then *everyone will know that you are my disciples*. So their chosen identity as his followers continues in random acts of service and care. Where do we find the strength to do that?

Jesus says *I'm going to ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (helper) to be with you for ever*. Advocate. The Greek word translated here is *Paraclete*. In the New Testament, it refers exclusively to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus. So by saying *another Advocate*, Jesus is saying that they won't experience his absence like you would other absences. *Another Advocate* says that the very same Jesus will be right inside them; inside us; the Spirit of Truth. Just think of hearing the teacher and guarantor of your own integrity and belonging speaking to you from inside your own heart. In two weeks, at Pentecost, we'll see this begin.

Jesus has told them about his own relationship with God the Father. Now this will be what his friends experience, and so also us. ²⁰*On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*. A beautiful Celtic knot! The lovely unity Jesus shares with his Father means that he reveals God's love most perfectly. Jesus shares that unity of love with us so we will always be in him and he in us, and by his grace, reveal him in a broken world that desperately needs his love.

And just like he did, we'll reveal that love through service; service like the washing of feet. It's not an essential service. It's a sign of love – something people can't earn. In life, there are chores needing prompt attention just so life's routines can go on. Doing them keeps tensions at bay. But what really turns community into a joyful experience is loving

service; like foot washing. And the word gets out! Amen