

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
May 9, 2010

John 14:23-29 **“The Holy Spirit Defense”**

All religions and faiths of the world have sacred Scripture. We call ours the Holy Bible. I believe that these words are sacred, but I also believe that the words of the Bible are not inerrant or literal. Scripture is a living thing. It is not history in the sense of facts, and yet it contains truth in the way it depicts the relationships of people. Scripture also contains promises and affirmations about the relationship of God to the people of the world—even today those promises are real.

In the Gospel according to John—the good news of Jesus as the writer of this Gospel interpreted it, there are promises as well. Hear the promises about God as told in John 14.

²³Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

Let us affirm the promises contained here by speaking them aloud. Please repeat after me: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Often throughout the Bible, we hear this kind of admonition—do not be afraid. It is often on the lips of angels who appear to tell someone extraordinary news—news that would often be frightening and yet the admonition is—do not be afraid.

Here Jesus speaks to his disciples—the ones who have followed him for three years. In this gospel, the writer has brought the story to Jerusalem just a short time before Jesus will be tried for the crime of inciting an uprising—an uprising based on loving people too deeply. The writer of John calls this the Last Supper discourse, but does not, as in Matthew and Luke, initiate the Eucharist—Holy Communion. As the story continues, the disciples are disturbed and perplexed; they have a lot of questions. Facing all this—his impending death and his disciples’ anxious souls, Jesus seeks to calm their fears. “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives....” This passage shows Jesus’ unwavering commitment to love and comfort his disciples and to stay the course.

Jesus encourages these anxious disciples with three promises. He first promises that neither he nor God would abandon them. Love and keep God’s word and we will come and make our home with you. We will move into the neighborhood. His second promise repeats the first

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promise but presses the point even further because he is telling them all this while he is still with them.

Because I have told you this now, nothing that happens from here on out should come as a surprise to you. And then Jesus throws the lifeline. Don't worry about forgetting all this because God will send an advocate, the Holy Spirit to remind you of what I said. This advocate, this Holy Spirit will teach you everything.

Jesus' third promise—despite all appearances to the contrary—was that his disciples would have his peace. Yes, they were going to encounter traumatic circumstances that would test their resolve and try their souls and Jesus' departure was imminent. But rather than allow them to remain in a state of denial that offered the possibility of some temporary respite, Jesus told them the truth. Even so, Jesus told them, you can have peace—my peace.

John's gospel speaks of the Holy Spirit as an advocate. The dictionary defines an advocate as one who pleads the cause of another. The thesaurus feature of my word processor gives these words as other options—supporter, backer, promoter, believer, intercessor, activist, campaigner, sponsor, defender, champion.

The Greek word used for “advocate” in this gospel is *paraclete*, formed from a verb that means “to call alongside.” A paraclete is the one whose name you call—when you are hauled into court on false charges, when the school bully is trying to beat you up on the playground, when you wake up from a bad dream in the middle of the night. A paraclete is the one who comes to your defense, your rescue, your comfort. This is what Jesus did for the disciples.

On this day, it strikes me that another advocate or paraclete in our world are mothers. The image of one who comes to your rescue or defense has a strong parallel to mothers or to those who have been mother to us.

Think of the things mothers say to children: “There, there it will be all right. Don't be afraid of the dark—I'm here with you. Thunder—why that's God bowling in heaven. Here—I'll kiss it and make it better.” Then of course as we grow older, mothers are also the ones who begin to push us to take responsibility and to deal with some of life's challenges. That mother might say, “Don't quit. Stick to it. Tough it out.” Or as a friend says, “Suck it up buttercup.”

Who have been the advocates in your life? Who have been the paracletes—the one who comes to your defense, your rescue, your comfort? On the screen are all the words that describe the Holy Spirit. Take a few moments and with someone around you, talk about the word that best fits your understanding of the Holy Spirit. And then take a few minutes to talk about someone who has been an advocate, a paraclete in your life.

My friend Marge had an experience aboard a plane bound for Cleveland, waiting for takeoff. As she settled into her seat, Marge noticed a strange phenomenon. On one side of the airplane a sunset suffused the entire sky with glorious color. But out of the window next to her seat, all Marge could see was a sky dark and threatening, with no sign of the sunset.

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As the plane's engines began to roar, a gentle Voice spoke within her. "You have noticed the windows," the voice murmured beneath the roar and thrust of takeoff. "Your life, too, will contain some happy, beautiful times, but also some dark shadows. Here's a lesson I want to teach you to save you much heartache and allow you to abide with continual peace and joy."

"You see, it doesn't matter which window you look through; this plane is still going to Cleveland. So it is in your life. You have a choice. You can dwell on the gloomy picture. Or you can focus on the bright things and leave the dark, ominous situations to Me. I alone can handle them anyway. The final destination is not influenced by what you see and hear along the way."

"Learn this, act on it and you will be released, able to experience the 'peace that passes understanding.'"

Catherine Marshall, "Touching the Heart of God,"

We sometimes forget the turmoil and confusion that the early Christians experienced in the first century. The farther they got from the resurrection, the harder it was to stay the course. I believe that John was trying to give the disciples something significant to hold on to as a promise and as a way to remember the example that Jesus lived. It has become for us the same promise and remembrance. "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you."

I believe this Advocate, the Holy Spirit is the gift that Jesus promised to the disciples and that is still active in our world today. I believe the Holy Spirit works in ways that we cannot explain and that to attempt an explanation, a proof, is less important than to accept the gift of that mystery. I cannot explain many things, but I accept them for what they bring to my life.

A woman with small children was out and about doing errands. As she made her way through traffic, in and out of stores, the children tested her patience—you know the scene don't you. "Mom, can't I have some candy? Mom, I want a toy. Mom, Timmy's bothering me."

As she travels down the road, thinking of all the things she must do when she returns home, the weariness and frustration overtake her. At a stoplight, she lowers her head for a moment and says, "O God, how am I going to manage?" When she looks up, the license of the car in front of her says simply, "Be Joyful."

The Holy Spirit comes to us in hundreds of ways each day—in the sign along the road, the bumper sticker on the car in front of us, in the gifts of people who are willing to plead our cause, support us in times of trial, weep with us, laugh with us, and be our champion.

Let us again affirm these promises as we go forth in the power of God's love.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not let them be afraid.