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5/17/20--University Presbyterian Church
John 14:15-21

FAITHFUL COMPANION

Today's scripture reading from the Gospel of John is kind of like a movie trailer--those previews you see at the movie theater for coming attractions. A good movie trailer reveals just enough of the movie to get you interested in seeing it. A poor movie trailer gives away the whole movie. Pentecost is still two weeks away, that day we celebrate when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and empowered them to carry out Christ's ministry. It's not *yet* Pentecost, but today's scripture reading gives us a preview of the coming attraction that will take place in two weeks. Jesus gives us just enough of a preview to pique our interest.

Our passage today is part of a farewell discourse Jesus gives to his disciples just prior to his arrest and crucifixion. He knows that soon he will be taken from them and he gives them some last minute words of direction and encouragement. Jesus knows what they do not: he knows that he will be arrested and tortured, he knows that they will see and experience all this trauma, he knows that after he is gone they themselves will go through hardships and trials and difficulties. He knows they will be afraid and will feel lost without him. And so he tells them something very reassuring. He tells them that after he is gone, God will give them another *Advocate*--the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says something so loving and caring to his closest friends. He says, "I will not leave you orphaned." To be orphaned is to be alone in this world. To be orphaned is to feel as if no one cares about whether you live or whether you die. To be orphaned is to have no one to guide you, to help you, to care for you. Jesus knows he will die and will leave his friends, but he says to them, "I will *not* leave you orphaned." In his place they will receive another Advocate, or

as sometimes translated, another *Counselor*, another *companion* for the journey through life. He promises them the gift of the Holy Spirit. The disciples will *not* be alone to face hardships or to try to figure their way through difficulties. They will *not* be alone--for the Holy Spirit will be with them.

The Greek word Jesus uses for *Advocate* means "to come alongside another." Isn't that a great image: the Holy Spirit coming alongside us as we journey through life, as we face our hardships, go through sorrows, struggle with relationships, even experience pandemics. Life is hard and none of us can face it alone, especially during traumatic and challenging times like we are facing now.

We need the companionship of the Holy Spirit especially during frightening and challenging times because truthfully trauma and hardships do not always bring out the best in us. Now there are definitely wonderful examples of human compassion at work in the world right now. There are a lot of wonderful examples right in our church of many of you doing very thoughtful acts of compassion and care and generosity and service. The Spirit of God has moved in your hearts and lives and we absolutely want to remember these acts of kindness and compassion and courage and to give thanks to God for the Spirit's inspiration--the Spirit who has come alongside us and is leading us in God's way.

But it is also important to remember the role the Spirit of God plays when we are *not* at our best. Sometimes hardships and difficulties and stressful situations do not bring out the best in us. People fight. People hoard. And people brandish assault weapons at state capitol buildings in anger. Relationships can suffer at such times. We can become impatient and hostile to loved ones. Out of fear we may become less generous to others. In seeking security, we may turn away from God's ways. Sometimes hardship does not bring out the best in us. Maybe you

can recall a time when that was true for you, when, in the face of a hardship or trying time, you were not at your best.

It was certainly true for the disciples. When Jesus was arrested, they all royally messed up. They deserted Jesus. They denied knowing Jesus. They left *him* orphaned at a time when he was most vulnerable and in need of support. In the face of trauma, the disciples did not display their best selves.

And yet still, as Jesus talks to them in advance of his arrest, knowing that they will fail him, Jesus offers them this promise, this gift of love: I will not leave you orphaned. I will not leave you alone, no matter what--even when you royally mess up. For Jesus promises to give them and us the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of truth." What is this *truth* that Jesus speaks about? The truth is that God is love. By love, I don't mean just that warm feeling we feel in our hearts. Think of God's love as a large umbrella. Underneath that umbrella of God's love we find forgiveness, we find generosity, we find service to others, we find justice, we find compassion. The Spirit of God is this faithful companion, that comes alongside us in life to guide us in the ways of God's love, to sustain us in living out God's truth, to forgive us when we fail to be our best selves, and to empower us to try again.

In these days when the news is filled with so many stories of hardship, I think about all those people who need advocates and companions to come alongside them in life. I think about people who have lost their jobs. I think about immigrants and refugees who find themselves in a kind of legal limbo at this time. I think about those women and children who are not safe in their own homes. I think about African American men who live in fear for their safety in a country where they get shot for just going out jogging, and who cannot trust law enforcement or the justice system to do right by them. Because God has come alongside us, we are called to come

alongside one another. The Spirit of God is needed by all of us so that no one will feel orphaned.

We need the Spirit of God to guide us in the ways of being and living out God's ways. For we

can only ever hope to be our best selves when we are walking in the truth and the love of God.

And may the Spirit of God go with us.