

“Not a Parakeet”

John 14:15-21

My mother was a little secretive about some things. Up until recent times, she would not talk much about dying, and seldom did she express much sentimentally to her children and grandchildren. Lately, though, she became much more open to saying she loved us all, and asking for forgiveness for not being a better parent or grandparent. (Not sure where all of that came from.) I got my copy of her will the other day from the lawyer’s office. It was made out several years ago, but not once do I remember her ever suggesting what was in it. One thing I knew for sure, none of us would become millionaires after reading it! When my mother’s father died years ago, he made my mother executrix of the estate. Her two brothers had difficulties with that decision. By the way they treated my mother at that time, it was apparent they believed my grandfather had made a big mistake. The union of my mother and her brothers was shattered, but thankfully, it wasn’t permanent. Nevertheless, it was a hardship that in no way did she ever intend for it to happen with her children. She said it often that she did not want her children to act the way her brothers did with her. We promised like good children ought to promise; but I did throw in a few comments to liven things up a bit. I always did think that I saw more of the house I grew up in, in my sisters’ houses in later years, or occasionally mention my brother, “the good son”. He was a good son, but my mother made it very clear she loved us all! (She could be rather sensitive and defensive at times.)

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Perhaps my mother was hoping that her children would show their love for her by obeying her wishes. I was also wondering about the men and women we honor Monday. What moves someone to go into the military knowing what possibly could happen? What is it about veterans who so proudly wear their “uniform”, and wave the flag? Why would a soldier wish to go to war knowing the possibility of severe injury or death? Why do we remember these people Memorial Day? Well, they love their country, much like children love parents, and much like all of us love our Lord Jesus.

Jesus is approaching the time of his crucifixion, suffering and death. In these couple of chapters of John, it is somewhat like a last will and testament from Jesus for his disciples and followers. We recall reading in the other gospel accounts when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Peter, often impulsive, boldly announced that no way would that happen. Of course, none of us ever want to lose someone we cherish and love. We already know that after Jesus died, the disciples were lost. Perhaps they were not listening carefully when Jesus shared these words from the gospel reading today. *I will not leave you orphaned.* He would not abandon them, and the promise extends to us. Neither will he leave us. Do you ever feel at times the presence of someone you love even though that person may no longer be with you? I'm sure many of us, if not indeed all of us, have sensed the spirit and love of another dwelling with us and in us. Jesus promises us that he will always remain with us because he loves us. When we live in his commandments, we sense his love even more. It is a relationship between people who love one another, and the love grows stronger and surer in those who honor and respect each other. Jesus loves us regardless of our loving him. Yet, when his commandments are followed, his love is present and sure for us even without him physically present.

He sends us the Holy Spirit to ensure his presence and love. The word used in the Greek is "Paraclete." That was not "Parakeet"! The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, comes to bring Jesus into our homes and hearts, our lives and houses. The Paraclete makes known Jesus in how he loved us from the cross and now from heaven. The Paraclete is an advocate for us, but she also is one who admonishes us, exhorts or prods, encourages and comforts. When we are gathered together in the presence of God, and with one another, the Holy Spirit is truly working as we are encouraged together in the faith of believing that our Lord never leaves alone or abandoned, even though he ascended into heaven. He is here with us, giving us his word of hope and promise, uniting us together in spirit and person, encouraging us to care for each other and to comfort those who are in need. Jesus is alive among us and in us when we are quick to live our lives according to the commands of our Lord, especially when we love one another as we have been loved.

I had a funeral for a woman who died unexpectedly from a heart attack. She was quite young. Her husband is devastated. You can understand why. The family members of the husband have been concerned about him lately. He keeps asking, "Why did you leave me?" That happens when a loved one dies, and of course, it can happen when any kind of a relationship ends. When have you asked God if he has left you? We seldom give him thanks for being with us when things are going just fine, but how quickly we will wonder where he is if things start going downhill. Who would blame any people of Joplin, Missouri, for asking where was God when the tornado ripped through their town? Many asked where he was the infamous day of September 11, 2001. When we honor and remember those who serve our country, some will ask the same questions. Sometimes it seems that God left us the day he ascended into heaven.

But then, maybe those who are feeling the loneliest are the ones needing the Paraclete. The Holy Spirit may be working with them, but often the Spirit uses others to be a presence to those who are the loneliest. There are support groups of various kinds that some people depend upon. They are wonderful and necessary. But what happens if you have few people helping you along when you are in need. What happens if there isn't anyone letting you know they care? What happens if you do not know who to lean on in time of trouble? What would happen if you lost everything in a terrible storm, or lost someone you loved very much, and there was no one there to help you or care about you? In other words, what would happen if God seemed he didn't care because none of his own reached out even a hand or spoke a kind word?

We have all heard someone attempt a deal with us or try to manipulate us by saying, "if you really love me, you would..." That's trouble. Jesus is not suggesting that at all. He is not giving us an "if", then "you would" proposition. He is stating something about our relationship with him and each other. Loving Jesus is obeying his commands. This is not the 10 Commandments he is speaking about, but the commandments he himself has given--commandments about loving God first of all and above all, and loving one another as we have been loved by Jesus. We are the image of Jesus. We are the presence of our Lord. We are the love of Jesus visible in this world that struggles with understanding his kind of love. We are the

ones who would do anything to keep him alive in us and go to any extent to let him know how much we love him. A parent does that for a child. A soldier does that for one's country. A friend will lay down one's life for a friend. Friends show their love for each other in many ways. Christians show their love for Jesus by obeying his commands and wishes in this world and time.

We have the help to show that love. It is a gift from above sent to us through our baptisms, through our gatherings, through the Word read and preached, through the Lord's Supper, through our mutual love and caring. The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete that moves, encourages, prods, pokes, yanks, loves, helps, comforts, promises and presides with us that we always remember that Jesus is indeed with us even when he seems so absent. He is here through his Spirit who helps us keep our eyes and hearts focused on the cross and in the Word, promising he will never abandon nor orphan us. This same Paraclete works in us to be the visible presence of God in our encouraging and comforting others when they so desperately need to know that someone cares, and especially that God does. We are exhorted and gifted to be paracletes for each other assuring this world that God exists seen in the lives of those who love Jesus.

We know those who are no longer with us in this life still remain with us in spirit. We can look at pictures and immediately feel like we are in that very moment. We promise never to let the honor and respect for our heroes be forgotten when we observe a day like Monday. We show our love for those who have loved us. We leave loving one another here, and then step into the life of the world where we continue to let the presence of Christ be seen and known. We are never without the help to keep the faith. The Paraclete is alongside of us reminding us that Jesus is alive in us, making his home and abiding in us, that we might be there for those who need us. It is a love promised to Jesus just like all four of us promised our mother that she need not worry about what we would do when she was gone. Our love for her would be evident in how we will treat one another. Likewise, our love for our God is alive in how we love him and one another. Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**