

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 14, 2023

John 14:15-21

15”If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. **17**This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18”I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. **19**In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. **20**On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. **21**They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.

Sermon

Today’s Gospel reading reminds me of walking a prayer labyrinth. The path intentionally curves in on itself. Attempting short cuts to the center or destination misses the whole point of the walking...or in our case the Gospel reading.

John’s Gospel bends around love—using the word more than fifty times—gradually leading us deeper toward love. “We’re there” before we ever arrive “there” when it comes to love.

Jesus tells his followers that if they love him they will obey his commandments. Jesus gives one commandment in John’s Gospel —to love one another and Jesus has loved us.

Remember Maundy Thursday when we heard how Jesus loved his people to the end? He washes feet and serves even those who would betray him or deny him. Both happen.

So much for sentimentality.

A colleague of mine likes to say she imagines the disciples sleeping with one eye open as they bed down for the night. Remember how much infighting went on with this group. Remember that when Jesus spoke of his pending death, the disciples' immediate response was poor attempt at a succession plan. Yet... Jesus says to his friends, "Love one another as I've loved you", that night when he washes feet and breaks bread.

The path winds back over Jesus declaring that God loves the world enough to risk everything by sending God's own Word made flesh—so "one another" isn't a cozy club; it's as universal as God's love.

The path arcs enough for us to see ahead to Jesus laying down his life and taking it up again...we get a glimpse of Jesus after he's risen telling Simon Peter that loving Jesus will mean Peter cares for those Jesus calls his sheep.

Today John's Gospel path of love wraps all around us...For the first time, Jesus tells his followers that another advocate will come alongside them. Another. As Professor Karoline Lewis reminds us, "another" means there has been one already—Jesus! The way Jesus has been with the disciples continues with a promised 'advocate'/teacher or companion—we understand this one who accompanies us as God's own Spirit.

Jesus lovingly teaches, challenges, comforts, confronts, heals, and forgives. Jesus embodies love; for the disciples, for people around him and for the entire world. As Jesus reflects on his earthly life and ministry and prepares his followers he invites them into something far beyond to-do lists, or ideological pledges to sign—he invites us to the path of embodied love where we learn to love— as God in Christ first loved us.