

John's Jesus says something essential here in two ways. At the beginning of this reading, Jesus says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments", and then at the end: "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me."

These lines are like two slices of good marble rye with a warm stack of pastrami in between. What Jesus says between these two verses is truly the meat of this reading. But catching the significance of what Jesus is telling his followers depends on how we experience the lines on either side.

In the reading we heard last week, Jesus told the disciples that he was about to leave them and then he reassured them that he would come to them again. That prompted Philip to ask Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus responded by telling Philip that the Father was within Jesus, and he in the Father. As evidence, Jesus turned his followers' attention to God's presence in the works Jesus had done.

He went on to declare that God would continue to work through those who trusted in Jesus. At the end of last week's Gospel, Jesus promised this: "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." And this morning's reading immediately follows that promise.

Jesus is still talking. And his followers are still full of questions. One of those questions must surely be something like: "Right. 'If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.' And just how is *that* supposed to work?"

Before they can start peppering him with their questions, Jesus says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus is not, of course, leaving some magic formula for fulfilling wishes. But just as importantly, Jesus is also not wagging a finger at his followers and telling them to behave. He is not saying: "If you want to prove that you really and truly love me, then back it up with your actions."

Instead, Jesus what *is* telling them is *how* they will be able to do the works of God that he has been doing, and still greater works. Jesus is describing the consequences of maintaining a loving relationship with him.

The command he has left – to love each other as he has loved us – will supply his followers with inspiration and energy, words and listening, humility and courage – *everything they need* to live and spread the way and the truth and the life of Jesus Christ.

Their ability –and ours – to love one another as Christ loves us originates in the divine love that God constantly pours forth through Christ. Staying in relationship, united to that *living flow*, is how God works through us.

Now, don't you just know that Philip, Thomas and the other disciples have a newly burning question: If Jesus is returning to the Father, well, then how are we supposed to stay connected to him?

Again, without giving them a moment to ask, Jesus answers: "...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." Now the English word "advocate" is loaded with legal implications. That makes sense if Jesus is implying that we are going to be hauled before a judge in God's heaven where we will have to prove that our actions were worthy of God's love.

I think John's Jesus is up to something different. So I prefer to use the Greek word that John used – *paracletos* or the anglicized "paraclete" – a word that simply means "one called to come alongside." Without the legalistic baggage, we have a word that can describe the *living flow itself*; the life-giving energy of God's love that flows through Christ, our brother and our redeemer.

John's Jesus describes the Paraclete as *another* companion. Jesus was the companion who revealed himself as the way, the truth and the life. The other companion is the spirit that animated him and filled him perfectly; the breath of the way, the truth and the life. And this other companion has already come alongside; already abides within, among and around Jesus and his followers.

The world has difficulty seeing the perfect image of the invisible God in Jesus, but his followers recognize their own mutual indwelling with God through Christ in the unifying love of the Paraclete. Those who wait and watch with eyes that see only the material world are blind to this unity.

Jesus promised he would not leave his followers orphaned and that he would come to them. And the Risen Christ *still* reveals himself in the flow of God's love between and among his followers. To be a follower then

is to aspire to keep Jesus' command: to love each other as he has loved us. Our Christ-centered loving behavior is a powerfully captivating sign of the presence of God made available for all creation to see.

Through our Christ-centered love, God makes a path available to a relationship in unity beyond what is observable to the naked eye. The love given by God through the Spirit reveals the Son who is the image of our invisible Father. God gives this love for anyone who turns their attention to God's love and consents to devote themselves to living into God's grace.

"...those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Jesus came alongside us first – the perfect manifestation of God's love in human form – so that we might have some tangible way to encounter, to touch, and to see God's presence. The other companion alongside us in John's Gospel is the life-giving Spirit that was in the beginning with the Word of God.

This companion *is* the Spirit of Christ, the Third Person of the Trinity. The Paraclete is not some kind of ghostly apparition of the dead Jesus who shows up like some sort of "polter-Christ." This always, already-present companion *is* the life-giving breath of God.

John's prologue says that all who receive and trust the Word of God are given "the power to become the children of God." That power is the Paraclete, the Spirit that Jesus is referring to.

One way to understand the role of the Paraclete and what it means to be a child of God is to read John's Gospel and pay close attention to what Jesus does. The Paraclete is present in all the signs that Jesus performs, in all the words that Jesus speaks and in all the love that Jesus leaves with the people he encounters.

Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father. Jesus gave the example of his entire life as evidence of the presence of God. Then he promised to all his followers that one day we would know "I in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." The Paraclete brings us into the presence of the Risen Christ who is the true image of the invisible God.

And so another way to understand the role of the Paraclete and to see what it means to be a child of God is to look around you, watching for the impulse of the Paraclete operating as a sort of empathy engine. The Risen Christ, and the Paraclete abide with us as God's Word made Flesh,

reminding us of what Jesus taught and how he lived. Is it any wonder that Jesus says that we know this companion? The Paraclete, do you see, has at one time or another looked a great deal like someone we know.

Whenever someone comes alongside us to help us find our strength when we are sure we have none, the Paraclete is with us. Whenever someone comes alongside us to help us find our voice when we can't seem to find it, the Paraclete is with us. Whenever someone comes alongside us to guide us toward the light when everything appears to be darkness, the Paraclete is with us.

And, at least occasionally, the Paraclete has looked a lot like each one of us.

The Paraclete is present when we come along side another person to comfort them in their grief or help them to find their own dignity; when we encourage or challenge each other, holding out the hope that we will manifest our best selves. Whenever we are moved to get alongside a brother or a sister in need, the Paraclete is there. Whenever we are compelled to express the love of Christ to another – in short, when we act like Jesus – the Paraclete is there.

The more we let ourselves love like Christ loves, the more that love will move us to act like Jesus, and supply us with what is necessary. The Paraclete, the very breath of God, is already abiding with us and will be there to help us to serve God's creation wherever there is need.

The tomb is empty and the light shines on in the darkness. And right now, in this very moment, God's promise of resurrection life in all its fullness is as close to the children of God as our next breath. Breathe deep then and breathe the love of Christ.

Works consulted:

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