

The In Dwelling of the Holy Spirit John 14:15-23

The words in the second of the readings, John 14:15-23, were spoken by Jesus just before his arrest and crucifixion. They are words of reassurance for the disciples for they were both puzzled and deeply concerned by his talk of his impending death. Peter was even prepared to lay down his life for Jesus. Other disciples wanted to follow Jesus and be with him no matter where that led. The disciples loved their Master. But Jesus had told them it wasn't possible for them to continue to be with him. He was going away. However, he did say that in time, in the future, they would be able to join him.

Following on from that, Jesus gives them a challenge and an assurance. The challenge is this: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."* (14:15)

While the assurance is this, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever-the Spirit of truth."* (14:16)

Love and Obedience

Let's focus first on the words, *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."*

We can probably all remember times when a person we loved or respected gave us instructions. Although we may have wanted to do otherwise, we followed those instructions, not so much out of fear of the consequences from our disobedience, but more because we didn't want to let that person down. They held us in some esteem and we held them in esteem so we followed their instructions. When I went overseas for an extended length of time, my father asked only one thing of me. He asked me not to visit Northern Ireland. His father, my grandfather was from County Antrim in Northern Ireland. In the late 1970s it was a centre of conflict between the Ulster Defence Force and the IRA during the Troubles. Dad was fearful as to what may happen to me because of my Protestant Irish background, and although I considered this to be totally unlikely, I respected his wishes. I obeyed his wishes because he was genuinely fearful and he was my father.

Jesus required his disciples to show their love for him by obeying what he commanded.

But just what did Jesus command his disciples? Does Jesus have something in particular in mind when he says this?

In Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount many of his teachings are preceded with the words *"But I tell you."* These teachings are instructions as to how the disciples should live but they are not technically classified as commandments. John's gospel also records teachings of Jesus that indicate how we should live but none of them are specifically commands. But we come to the time after the Last Supper when Judas is no longer in the company of Jesus. It is then that Jesus turns to the other disciples and says to them *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (13:34-35) He repeats this command to the disciples in 15:12 when he says, *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved*

you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” And again in 15:17, “This is my command: Love each other.”

It makes sense that this is the command Jesus would have foremost in his mind when he says to the disciples “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (14:15)

Perhaps the most famous verse in the NT- is John 3:16, “For God so LOVED the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” If God loved all of us then it follows that God should want us to love each other. Jesus wants his disciples to love each other. The fact that it is the only “command”, as such, that he gives them, makes it a statement of incredible significance and power. It is a tremendous guiding principle for our lives.

Jesus expected the disciples to show their love for him by obeying his command, but for his part he provides this assurance,

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever-the Spirit of truth.” (14:16)

Probably all of us have attended a funeral. Funerals can be quite different to each other but there are some elements that many have in common. There is normally a time of reflection on the life of the deceased when they are remembered with a mixture of respect, sentiment and love. The sharing of these memories may bring comfort to the grieving but often there is another component of the funeral. And that is a time when words of reassurance, comfort and hope are shared. These words are meant to help abate the grief and give courage and strength for the future. To help with moving forward without the physical presence of the deceased. I say moving forward without the physical presence of the deceased for I am sure that some of us have felt the on-going presence of a loved one long after their death. The memory of them is so strong that we can accurately imagine what they would do and say in certain circumstances. We know what advice they would give when decisions need to be made. We know their priorities. We know their thought patterns.

As the crucifixion of Jesus draws near, he offers words of comfort and encouragement to his disciples. He will not leave them with just a strong memory of what he said and did, but he will leave them with the Spirit. Whereas memories fade with time, this Spirit will be with them forever (14:16). People in the Old Testament experienced the Spirit but it was often a passing feature in their lives. It wasn't with them forever. It came and went from God's servants at various times ([1 Samuel 19:23](#); [2 Chronicles 15:1](#); [Judges 14:6](#)). But for the disciples the Spirit would be with them forever.

Let's turn our attention now to [The Spirit and its Purpose](#)

Depending upon which version of the NIV we have, we find in 14:16 that the word for Spirit is translated as Counsellor or Advocate. The old KJV translates the word for Spirit as Comforter whereas the NKJV translates it as Helper. They are all acceptable translations of

the original Greek word, *Paracletos*. The word can be interpreted many ways and only the old Catholic version of the Bible was wise enough not attempt a translation but left it as *Paraclete*. The majority of translations favour advocate or helper. An advocate is someone who speaks on your behalf and so we get the impression that Jesus is gifting a Spirit that will intercede on the disciples' behalf with the Father.

In verse 16 Jesus refers to the Spirit as “another” Paracletos. He uses the word “another” because while He was with the disciples in the flesh, it was he, Jesus who was their Paracletos their advocate, their counsellor, their comforter, their helper.

It is not until we read later verses in John 14,15 and 16 that we are given a more detailed description of what the Spirit will do. It will teach the disciples and help them remember all Jesus had said (14:26); it will testify to Jesus just as the disciples are to testify to Jesus (15:26); it will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.(16:8); it will guide the disciples in all truth (16:13).

In 14:16 Jesus also refers to the Spirit as the Spirit of truth. At the very start of John's gospel we read that Jesus was full of grace and truth. (John 1:14) The very essence of Jesus' nature is grace and truth. In last week's gospel passage Jesus referred to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life, so Jesus has characterised himself as “the truth.” So the Spirit, because it is the Spirit of Truth, will continue to lead people into understanding the truth of Jesus' life.

In Jesus conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well he said to her, “*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth.*” (John 16:12-15)

Apart from making the point that we can worship God anywhere, for worship is a spiritual activity, we don't have to be in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus is also telling the Samaritan woman that worship requires knowledge and understanding of the true God of the OT and the revelation of Him in Jesus. For this is where truth lies.

In 14:17, referring to the Spirit, Jesus says to the disciples, “*but you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*” Jesus discloses the close relationship between himself and the Spirit and the disciples, both in the present and in the future. When Jesus says, “*but you know him for he lives with you*” he means that the Spirit already exists in himself so while ever the disciples are with Jesus they are with the Spirit. When he says “*and will be in you,*” he refers to the time when he will no longer be a physical presence in the disciples' lives but then that they will know the in-dwelling of the Spirit.

In 14:18 he assures the disciples that he will not leave them as orphans but he will come to them. In the ancient world, being an orphan was more tragic than it is today. Orphans were effectively homeless and penniless, dependent entirely on the charity of strangers. When Jesus promises not to leave the disciples as orphans, he is assuring them that this is not the end of their relationship with Him. They will not be abandoned or left without help. He recognises

their great dependency upon him for leadership, guidance and security. He can feel their confusion, their sense of foreboding, their sense of loss. He understands how they feel.

Jesus has distinguished his disciples from people who aren't his followers, from people he refers to as the world. The Holy Spirit is for his followers, not for the world in general. When he is no longer physically alive then the world will not see him anymore. The disciples will see him spiritually, for the Spirit will be in them.

Later, when one of the disciples questions Jesus as to why he will show himself to the disciples but not to the world, Jesus replies in 14:23, *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."* The Father will love **anyone** who obeys Jesus teaching and both Jesus and the Father will come and make their home with that person. The promise of the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit that Jesus makes to the disciples, also applies to anyone who will obey Jesus' teaching.

Inter-relationships

Relationships is an important theme in today's passage. You may remember that last week we heard the words of Jesus describing his relationship to the Father. In 14:10-11a Jesus said to Philip, *"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."* Jesus was telling Philip and the other disciples that the Father and Jesus mystically dwell within one another.

This morning we read that the Spirit will be with the disciples. (14:17). We also find Jesus telling the disciples that *"on that day you will realise that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you (14:20)*. So the disciples are one with the Father and the Son. And the Spirit is with the disciples. So the intimate relationship that exists between Jesus, God, and the Spirit also includes the disciples.

Let us go back to the words we find in 14:23 for they remind us that this intimate relationship is available today for anyone who obeys Jesus teaching,

"If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

What Jesus has been teaching the disciples applies equally to his followers today.

It is probably worthwhile pausing here to just consider the extraordinary nature of the relationship we can have with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If we fully appreciate that the Father, Jesus, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not just out there somewhere, but dwell within us, and we dwell in them, then this should impact all we think, say and do

Years ago I remember a friend telling me that their son had stopped attending church because he felt the Spirit had left him. Some of us may remember a period in our Christian life when the Father/ Jesus/ the Holy Spirit felt very close. Because of this our life was vibrant and full of meaning. It was undeniable that God was working in our life. We were a changed person. We had been born anew. God's presence was so real. But that period newness in our life passed. We moved into a life where we walked by faith. Life appeared to have much fewer

spiritually uplifting moments. Like my friend's son we could feel that the Spirit had left us. Alternatively, we could trust in God's word rather than our feelings. Jesus promised the disciples he would send the Spirit to be with them forever. Trust God's word not feelings- the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, dwell with God's people forever!

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Make us into a more obedient people, loving each other as you have loved us. Thank you for your presence in our lives, comforting, helping and advocating on our behalf. Guide us into a deeper understanding of you and all that is true.