

Let us pray: God of sacred story, may these words bring us new awareness and under-standing. Amen.

The setting...friends sitting around the table after the meal has ended - gives a give particular feel to the story. The disciples are lingering, maybe enjoying another bowl of *haroseth*, another cup of wine.

Ancient meals had two main courses, the *deiphon*, or main course, when the actual meal was eaten, and the *symposium*. The Oxford Dictionary describes a *symposium* as a conference or meeting to discuss a particular academic subject. Greek philosophers preferred ‘conversations’ at their symposia.

In the ancient Hebrew context, during the second part of the meal, there was an extended period of wine drinking, conversation, and often musical entertainment.

We still do this today; another cup of coffee, story-telling, laughter, maybe even singing, another piece of pie, maybe discussing something serious. The gospels often portray Jesus sitting at a table with his disciples during the symposia.

In this week’s Gospel reading, Jesus is asking the disciples to keep his new commandment to love one another. Jesus does most of the talking, with the disciples interrupting now and then to ask questions.

The main concern of this last speech, this last essay, this last *will* of Jesus’ is to let them know of his impending departure -the effect his absence will have on them, how they should respond after he’s gone. And to make up for his absence, he will send them an Advocate, a Counselor who will be with them forever: the Spirit of Truth (14: 16-17).

Advocate - an alternate word for Spirit – a promise to the disciples, and to us. Christ’s bodily presence can only be in one place at a time, but the Spirit can be everywhere, at all times.

I think most of us, when we hear the word “Spirit”, think of something “in the air”, something not quite as ‘concrete’ as God, or Jesus.

Do we think of the Spirit as ‘our own, personal’ spirit? Or do we think ‘it’ belongs to everyone? Is my Spirit the same as yours? Many of our hymns focus on an experience of the Spirit that is personal and individual.

Some of us might be un-settled by the notion of a ‘spirit’, but for many of us the Spirit brings comfort, especially when the world around us seems to be spinning out of control. =The CO-vid 19 crises we’re in right now.

The word “Advocate” feels a bit stronger, determined, maybe....it brings other images to mind; a champion, a supporter, promoter, a campaigner.

As clergy, my colleagues and I are called, among other things, to be an Advocate for others; walking beside them. A voice for those who cannot speak, a justice-seeker for the oppressed, a comforter for the dying, a Sharer of the Word.

The Holy Spirit is an Advocate; working on my behalf, speaking for me when I couldn’t, or wouldn’t. **Linda Clader** uses the term Advocate to describe a ‘go-between’ -- between God and us.

The Greek word for Advocate, is “paraclete”-*one who has been called to our side-*to stand up for us, to explain our side to the court.

The Paraclete, or the Advocate, is power, strength and energy in action.

Jesus says, “*God will give you another Advocate.*” The first one is Jesus himself, and he certainly had power, strength and energy in action;

- the number of times he ate with sinners and outcasts,
- the money-changers in the temple, the healings, the preaching,
- the traveling back and forth between Jerusalem and Galilee.

Jesus was a man of action.

This Advocate, Jesus promises, will be “*with you...in you.*” Jesus himself, will be “in” the disciples, as he is “in” God, and the disciples will be “in him.”

Is it enough to imagine some kind of mystical union?

Is the “indwelling” of Christ, or the Spirit of Truth, a feeling of warmth and comfort, or a feeling of confidence? Is it an abstract idea? Uncertainty, Questioning, or a State of Grace? All of the above?

The Harper Collins Bible Commentary explains that the mysterious reference to Jesus’ resurrection points ahead to the disciples’ future state and knowledge.

The promise of his presence will be fulfilled for those (then, and *now*) who keep his commandments and, because of that, love him.

--The scene where Jesus is standing before Pontius Pilate in his headquarters and Pilate asks him, "What is the truth?"
Jesus just stands there, saying nothing....
When Pilate asks, "Have you no answer?" Jesus says nothing. (Why doesn't he answer?)

Because the answer is right there, in front of the Judean Governor.
"You're looking at it, Pilate! The truth is standing right there!
Look at him, and you will see what the Truth is."

Linda Calder says we can't see the Spirit, but we can see Jesus today, we can see him healing, and teaching, and dying in his faithfulness.

She asks us to imagine drawing a line around 'Jesus in action',
..but then you have a picture of what Pilate was asking about.

And we have a picture, or framework, of the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate; Jesus himself...dwelling in us, and among us. But does that line limit his actions? A difficult concept.

The story of Jesus is not about Jesus and *one* disciple, as is the case of prophets, or holy men from other faith traditions, but Jesus teaches, and heals, shares food, and walks *in community*.

Jesus is present and active in groups of people – real people, who sometimes struggle just to get along, and other times really sharing their successes, their hopes, their doubts, their questions.

When Jesus promises to be "in" his disciples, and promises they will be "in" him, he is not only talking about a sacred presence in an individual, but also a presence within a community.

The Greek words, "*in you*" can be translated to "*among you*" (plural). Is it easier if we understand Jesus' promise more in the Communal sense, rather than an Individual one... "*in us*" rather than "*in me*" ?

Maybe this thinking might reduce our anxiety a bit when we wonder whether we are in "right relationship" with God?
Am I doing ok? Does God really like an ordinary, not so perfect, person like me?
Or...are *we* in a right relationship with God? Are *we* doing okay?

And maybe this might allow us to change the focus from our own worthiness/un-worthiness to an active life of faithful service.

Mother Theresa embodied faithful, saintly Christian actions. But for most of her adult life she considered herself in darkness because she didn't feel the presence of Christ, and yet, she remained faithful in spite of the dark. It's amazing to think that she didn't feel Christ's spirit when for her entire life, her *whole being* Jesus was definitely "within" her.

Jesus clearly promises his presence, and the presence of the Advocate/the Spirit, to those who keep his commandments to love and serve one another.

The love Jesus commands is not a feeling, but an action.
The love Jesus commands is about a master washing the feet of his disciples, and an innocent man dying the death of a criminal.

What if we were to recognize that Christ is truly present *among us* when we keep his commandments to love and serve one another?

In the coming weeks, if we look around the wider community, can we see the outline, the framework, the line we drew around Jesus In Action?
Can we feel the presence of the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate that Jesus sent?
Are we inside, or outside, that line?

Let us pray: God, we thank you for seeking to create community by the gift of the Spirit.
May we, in turn, find ways to live in community by the Spirit's gift,
May we find ways to be a counselor for, and friend, to others.
Help us to always search for you.
Help us accept the help that is offered along the way.
Help us be awake to the Spirit's gift in our own lives. Amen.