

Rappahannock River District Sermon – May 17, 2020  
 The Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates  
 Theme: "LOVE, OBEDIENCE & FAITHFULNESS"

Text – John 14:15-21

In the 5th century AD, St. Augustine wrote about the "4 States of Man":

1. *Living according to the flesh:*

Human sacrifices, idols, and pagan ceremonies, domesticated animals, were often valued more highly than human life.

2. *Recognition of sin through the Law:*

So long as people knew the Law, it would not be so easy to ignore the Law. Without the reminders of the Law, we easily return to the first state of man.

3. *Faith in the help of God:*

Man begins to be moved by the Spirit of God.

We are still struggling against our own sinful nature because we have not yet been fully healed.

4. *The full and perfect peace in God:*

This we find in harmony with Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the person of Jesus Christ, we see how far we have departed from God.

Augustine adds, "The will of man is always free, even and particularly when it can no longer will to do evil."

But Adam and Eve were not gods, "and their 'free will' would not have sufficed, even in paradise, to merit immortality. Thus, divine assistance was needed.

And so this is the divine assistance as recorded by John.

**JOHN 14:15-24. OVERVIEW**

This discourse takes place at the Last Supper (see chapter 13), and represents Jesus' attempt to prepare the disciples for what is coming.

He begins by emphasizing **BELIEF** (14:1-14) then shifts to an emphasis on **LOVE** (14:15-24)

In verses 15-24, Jesus introduces two great ideas:

- First, "If you love, me, keep my commandments.

One who has My commandments, and keeps them, that person is one who loves Me" (vv. 15, 21, 23-24).

Jesus links **LOVE** and **OBEDIENCE**. It is tempting to talk about God's love without mentioning our duty to obey. The fact is, we need to preach the linkage between Love & Obedience.

- Second, “I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, that He may be with you forever. I will not leave you orphans” (vv. 16, 18).

This is Jesus’ promise to give us the Holy Spirit, who will become God’s presence with us on a daily basis.

### **JOHN 14:15-17. THE FATHER WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER PARACLETE**

“If you love me, keep my commandments” (v. 15). This passage begins and ends (vv. 15, 21) by tying love to obedience.

Our obedience is a sign of our love. In John’s Gospel, faithfulness to Jesus’ Words is a defining mark of discipleship (8:31; 37, 51; 12:47-48).

“keep my commandments” (v. 15). “keep” means to do or to fulfill.

“Commandments” is plural. In this Gospel Jesus has given the disciples *three* commandments (Lincoln, 393):

- “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (13:14-15).
- “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34-35).

The agape love that Jesus commands here is not sentimental feeling, because sentimental feeling cannot be commanded, but loving action can be commanded.

- “Don’t let your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (14:1).

The commandments to *LOVE* (13:34-35) and to *BELIEVE* (14:1) are open-ended, in contrast to most Torah laws, which are very specific.

It is easy to judge whether we have been faithful to the Torah law prohibiting adultery, but how can we know whether we have fulfilled the demands of *LOVE* or the demands of *FAITH*?

Jesus’ commandments require us to allow Him to reshape our lives.

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (v. 16).

This is the Spirit that descended on Jesus at His baptism (1:32).

This is the first time that Jesus uses the word Helper.

So, the shift from Spirit to Helper is significant here.

In the opening chapters of this Gospel:

- The Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and remained upon Jesus at His baptism (1:32).
- Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:33).
- Jesus tells Nicodemus that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (3:5).

Jesus says: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8).

- Jesus “gives the Spirit without measure” (3:34).  
For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.
- “God is Spirit” (4:24)—and “It is the Spirit who gives life” (6:63). "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

But the tone changes when Jesus begins to speak about the Spirit in chapter 14. The emphasis shifts to the **HELP** that the Spirit will render to the disciples.

- The Helper will be with the disciples forever (14:16).
- The Helper “will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you” (14:26).
- The Helper “will testify of Me” (15:26).
- It is to the disciples’ advantage that Jesus goes away, “for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (16:7).

Helper can mean a lawyer who pleads your case or a witness who testifies in your behalf. It can refer to a person who gives comfort, counsel, or strength in time of need. It can refer to a person who comes to the aid of someone who is in danger.

The literal meaning is “someone called in... to help” in a time of need (Barclay, 194).

Helper has been translated as Advocate, Counselor, Comforter, and Intercessor, but each of those expresses only one facet of Helper.

There is full richness of its various meanings.

Some English-language Bibles use the word Paraclete, which is not an English word but a transliteration of the Greek word.

The problem is that most people today don’t know what a Paraclete is, so using Paraclete without explanation won’t communicate clearly to most readers.

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “**ANOTHER PARAKLETOS**,” the implication being that Jesus is also a parakletos.

However, as a parakletos, Jesus is limited by the Incarnation—by time and space.

He can be in only one place at a time, and can help only a limited number of people in any given time.

Moreover, He is moving toward His glorification—His death, resurrection, and ascension—so He will be leaving the disciples.

The new parakletos will be with all disciples everywhere and will be with them forever.

Even though the Spirit-parakletos is coming to help us on earth, Jesus continues to serve as our parakletos in heaven.

“And if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Here the ascended Lord is viewed as a Paraclete in the court of heaven, pleading the cause of His own.

The Holy Spirit is then understood as the Paraclete from heaven, supporting and representing the disciples in the face of a hostile world” (Beasley-Murray, 256).

This must have been a welcome word to the Johannine church, which was suffering persecution and had to feel some sense of abandonment by Jesus.

This parakletos “is the Spirit of truth, whom the world (*cosmos*) cannot receive; because it neither sees Him nor knows him” (v. 17a).

It is interesting to see the Spirit associated with truth, for we have just had Jesus describe Himself as ‘the truth’ (v. 6), and we earlier learned that those who worship the Father must do so ‘in truth’ (4:23-24).

Clearly truth is very closely associated with the “Godhead” (Morris, 577).

While the word (*cosmos*) can be used to refer to the created world, in this Gospel it is the realm that is opposed to God:

- The Word “was in the world (*cosmos*), and the world (*cosmos*) was made through Him, and the world (*cosmos*) did not recognize Him” (1:10).
- The world (*cosmos*) loves “the darkness rather than the light; for their works (are) evil” (3:19).
- The world (*cosmos*) rejects the truth, because they have chosen to follow the devil, “a liar” (8:44).
- And yet, “For God so loved the world, (*cosmos*) that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (3:16).

While this verse acknowledges God’s love for the *cosmos*, it also tells us that it is a *cosmos* doomed to perish apart from belief in Jesus Christ.

“You know Him, (the parakletos) because He lives with you, and will be in you” (v. 17b). The word “abide” has to do with deep, ongoing relationships.

- Jesus said, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him” (6:56).
- He promised, “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (14:2), and calls the disciples to “remain in Me, and I in you” (15:4).
- He tells the disciples, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (15:10).

### **JOHN 14:18-20. I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ORPHANS**

“I will not leave you orphans” (v. 18a). Just as orphan describes a child whose parents have died, it also describes a disciple whose master has died.

“I will come to you” (plural) (v. 18b). Jesus is coming to the disciples.

Which “coming” is involved here—Jesus’ resurrection appearances, the coming of the parakletos, or Jesus’ Second Coming?

Most scholars agree that this “coming” is fulfilled by Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. The “you” is plural, so Jesus makes this promise to the community of faith (O’Day, 749). However, there is no reason to believe that Jesus will not come to us as individual believers as well.

“Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more; but you will see me” (v. 19a). After Jesus’ death, the world will not see Jesus again, but the disciples will see Him.

Likewise, the *cosmos* (the world opposed to God—the world that prefers darkness) cannot see Christ today, because their eyes have been blinded to the truth—blinded by their own choice.

It is only through the eyes of faith that we can see Christ.

Earlier, Jesus warned, “Yet a little while the *Light* is with you. Walk while you have the *Light*, that darkness doesn’t overtake you.

He who walks in the darkness doesn’t know where he is going. While you have the *Light*, believe in the *Light*, that you may become children of light” (12:35-36).

There are those, however, who love the darkness, because darkness hides evil deeds (3:19). Jesus calls us to live in the light.

“Because I live, you will live also” (v. 19b). “The theme...that Jesus’ life is the basis and source of Christian life is common NT doctrine (I Cor. 15:22)” (Brown, 646).

“In that day” (v. 20a). This phrase refers to the day in which the resurrected Jesus will appear to the disciples, but I will openly admit that it is opened for other interpretations.

For instance, “In that day” could refer to the day that the disciples will receive the Spirit. It could also refer to the day in which the disciples will see Jesus in glory.

“you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (v. 20b). Note the tightly woven relationship among Father, Son, and those who abide in Christ.

In His high priestly prayer which will follow shortly, Jesus will pray, “I pray... *that they may all be one*; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, *that they also may be one* in us; that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The glory which You have given Me, I have given to them; *that they may be one*, even as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You loved me” (17:20-23).

### ***JOHN 14:21. THE BLESSING OF THOSE WHO LOVE CHRIST***

In the Old Testament era, the test of faithfulness was obedience to the Torah law.  
In the New Testament era, the test of faithfulness is obedience to Jesus’ commandments.

We prefer to think of God’s love as unconditional, but this verse establishes two conditions for receiving the Father’s love:

- keeping Jesus’ commandments and loving Jesus.
- two conditions so interdependent that Jesus binds them together as if they were one.

Those who love Jesus will keep His commandments. God and Jesus love those who love Jesus and keep His commandments, and the Son promises to reveal Himself to them (see also 3:16-18).

The church at its best is a community of love, and that love gives the church great power. By becoming a community of love, the church is able to persuade the world of God’s love—something that it could never accomplish by any means.

No logic has the persuasive power of an act of kindness.

We cannot argue the *cosmos* into faith, but it is often possible to love the *cosmos* into faith.

Obedience to the commandment to love is important.

The defining marks of discipleship are Love, Obedience & Faithfulness.

Amen!