*<God, please have my words be what you would have them be. Amen.>*

***Grace, peace, and mercy are yours from the resurrected and living Christ who will never leave us orphaned. Amen***

In today’s Gospel text we have Jesus sitting around with his disciples on a Thursday evening. He knows that he will be crucified the following day, Good Friday, and he has spoken this painful truth to the disciples. He has already foretold his betrayal by Judas and his denial by Peter. The weight of impending loss crushes all the air out of the upper room. This Gospel reading comes from a portion of John’s Gospel called the Farewell Discourse. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death. He says that the Spirit of truth will be with them, even after he is gone.

**However, this text is not a systematic development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is a word of comfort spoken into a community that is already feeling crushed by grief.** The word used in the Greek text for this Spirit of God is Paraclete, which translates to “advocate” or “one who stands alongside”, and has legal overtones, such as a advocate that stands beside you while you are being accused by a powerful judge. The disciples and other followers of Jesus were part of a marginalized group living in a time of imperial rule. The far more powerful Roman Empire perpetually put the Jews, and other disenfranchised groups, on trial. The description of the spirit as an advocate would have provided tremendous comfort for those who were repeatedly stripped of their most basic rights.

All of this historical explanation is to frame this sense of communal liberation by the Spirit of truth. It is very easy for us to hear preaching about the Holy Spirit and immediately think of warm, personal feelings of security and comfort with God.  **We want to think of the Holy Spirit as sort of our own personal electric blanket**. We want to think that when we are feeling sad or distant from God, we can just turn on our access to the Holy Spirit and before we know it, we are warm and cozy and we feel better.

But that is not the Spirit that we hear about in today’s text. This spirit is not our therapist or best friend, this is a Spirit that comes in Love, but also comes with fire. This spirit burns away all that is false in this world and leaves behind newly forged truth. This spirit exposes injustice and oppression and demands and orchestrates change out of pure love. This spirit wants to burn away all that which keeps us from God, that is, sin and death. **This Spirit is ANOTHER advocate.** Jesus himself is the first advocate, working in community, present and active in the world. Crossing the hurtful boundaries that we erect between ourselves and others, and building bridges of reconciliation. This Spirit continues the liberating work of Christ.

We so often want to confine the Spirit to Pentecost. It seems to be less messy that way. None of this talking in tongues or being slain in the spirit business. The Spirit gets her one Sunday of the year, and then is put back into the box of church doctrine. But aside from the unpleasantness and chaos that comes along with the Spirit, I suspect we might have an even deeper motive for containing the spirit.  **The Spirit exposes the painful truths about ourselves that we wish would stay hidden. Because I fear that we as Americans are much more like the oppressors in the Roman empire than the oppressed.**

But we need to see what the Spirit reveals to us about ourselves. The work of Jesus, and indeed the work of the Advocate that comes after him, is to continually be forming and reforming the people of God. To strike down the walls that we build to separate us from one another. **To liberate the oppressed from their oppressors. To liberate the oppressors from themselves. To bring us all to new life in Christ.**

At first reading, today’s Gospel text appears to be full of divisions. The disciples receive the Spirit, but the world cannot. The world will not see Jesus, but the disciples will continue to do so. There seems to be a group that is “in” with Jesus, and a group that is “out.” **But if we place this text into the whole of John’s Gospel, we understand that the world has been forever changed by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The world cannot simply remain “the world” after Jesus has been in it. For the world to receive the Spirit means that it is no longer simply “the world.”** It is a place that has been changed by love. It is God’s world.

It is this incredible promise that makes the disciples feel the impending loss of Jesus so acutely. Loss is a universal aspect of the human condition. Loss is something that afflicts us whether rich or poor, young or old, man, woman, child. Just by living and loving we are open to the pain of loss. **The disciples felt the love of God in Christ and were transformed by it. To imagine losing that sense of belonging and belovedness was too painful to bear. This is why Jesus speaks the promise, “I will not leave you orphaned.” And he speaks it to us too.**

Jesus is not our personal savior, but rather, the savior of the whole world. **We hear this promise of the Spirit in these weeks after Easter to emphasize the promise that the resurrection is not a one-time culmination of the ministry of Christ.** The resurrection of Christ on Easter is the beginning for us. It is the beginning of a lifelong process of dying and rising, put into motion by the work of the Spirit. We are so loved by God that God sent Jesus Christ into the world that we might be saved from sin, death, and ourselves. Jesus sends his Spirit into the world so that what was begun so long ago on a cross will continue now and forevermore in abundant life in community.

Let us pray:

Spirit of God, you comfort us in our grief and affliction. You also afflict us in our comfort. We know that you are continually making us new and giving us abundant life as members of your body. Thank you for calling us into abundant life in community. Amen.

Social Media Ministry questions:

Where do we as a community need to be reformed in the Spirit?

Where do we individually need to be reformed in the Spirit?

Are you comforted or afflicted by this promise of the Spirit?