

John 14-17 Farewell Conversations  
John 14:15-21

<sup>15</sup>” If you love me, you will keep my commandments.  
<sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father,  
and he will give you another Advocate,  
to be with you forever.  
<sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth,  
whom the world cannot receive,  
because it neither sees him nor knows him.  
You know him,  
because he abides with you,  
and he will be in you.  
<sup>18</sup>” I will not leave you orphaned;  
I am coming to you.  
<sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me,  
but you will see me;  
because I live, you also will live.  
<sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father,  
and you in me, and I in you.  
<sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them  
are those who love me;  
and those who love me will be loved by my Father,  
and I will love them  
and reveal myself to them.”

I’m sure you have heard the story  
about the pastor that asked  
all the children to come forward one Sunday  
and explained, “I’m going to describe something,  
and I want you to raise your hand  
when you know what it is.”  
The children got all excited  
and the pastor said,  
“I’m thinking of something  
that lives in trees and eats nuts ...”  
No hands went up.  
“It can be gray or brown

and it has a long bushy tail ...”  
The children looked around at each other,  
but still no one raised a hand.  
“It runs through your yard  
and dogs love to chase them ...”

Finally, one little girl shyly raised her hand.  
The pastor, relieved says,  
“Okay, Maggie.  
What do you think it is?”  
“Well,” said the girl,  
“it sure sounds like a squirrel,  
but I bet it’ll turn out to be Jesus!”<sup>1</sup>

*I bet it will turn out to be Jesus.*

We used to say in seminary,  
*the answer is always Jesus.*  
Except for, like today  
when the answer isn’t Jesus;  
well, it’s not exactly Jesus.  
I’m going to perform a  
somewhat heretical task in this sermon,  
that is to split hairs  
within the Trinity.

Our God is Triune—three in one  
and one in three,  
but theologically speaking,  
we tend to talk about  
the first two members of the Trinity  
more than we talk about  
the third.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://stickwithjesus.wordpress.com/2015/09/28/its-a-squirrel/>

We have a rather weak pneumatology,  
which is a great scrabble word for,  
we have a weak theology  
of the Holy Spirit.

We address God with titles like,  
the Creator, and Father  
and can see God as the commandment giver,  
the sea part-er, the Almighty.  
We can picture Jesus in manger,  
as a boy in the temple,  
a man who walked on water,  
and who can give sight to the blind.  
But when we get to the Spirit,  
the best thing we can conjure up  
is sometimes a dove,  
sometimes wind,  
sometimes a still small voice or breath  
and the ever strange,  
tongue of fire.

Jesus talks longer in chapters 14-17  
than in any other of the gospels.  
These chapters are often called  
the *Farwell Discourse*,  
because Jesus speaks at length  
of getting his community for his absence.  
And because he will depart to the Father,  
because he knows the time is near,  
we find that in these 4 chapters  
John will try to flesh out  
Christ's promised abiding reality,  
for his community  
which means John will lay out  
a robust pneumatology.

Alright, enough of that word.

In these chapters before the cross,  
we find that the promised coming Spirit  
is *the* active and living presence of Jesus  
that dwells in and with believers  
once Jesus has ascended.

“The crucifixion will indeed  
bring an end to the incarnation,  
but the resurrection is not the *end all*  
of eternal life.

For the Gospel of John,  
the ascension is the final surety  
that secures every single claim  
about abundant life.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus claims in chapter 16,  
“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth:  
it is to your advantage that I go away,  
for if I do not go away,  
the Advocate will not come to you:  
but if I go, I will send him to you.”

In his final teachings to his disciples,  
Jesus is hoping to help them understand  
that after he is crucified, raised and ascended,  
he will still be with them;  
*except he won't.*

<sup>19</sup>In a little while  
the world will no longer see me,  
but you will see me;  
because I live,  
you also will live.

Clear as mud, right?  
In later verses he complicates  
things further:  
You heard me say to you,  
“I am going away  
and I am coming to you.”

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<sup>2</sup> Karoline Lewis, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-1415-21-5>

It is like he is speaking  
out of both sides of his mouth!  
It doesn't make sense  
—unless we know to read the Spirit's presence  
as Jesus' continued presence  
into what Jesus is saying.  
The world won't see me,  
but you will see me...

It is no wonder we have a hard time  
really talking about our pneuma—  
you thought I was going to say it,  
didn't you?

We do have a hard time  
wrapping our minds  
around the concept of the Spirit.  
But if we can look at  
on how John's Christ describes this Spirit,  
we might find a healthier picture  
of the Holy Spirit emerges.

Up to this point,  
we have had hints  
about the Spirit's role  
in the lives of believers.  
John mentions the Spirit's power  
to bring a believer  
into a new birth  
with the story of Jesus and Nicodemus;  
and Jesus teaches at Capernaum that  
anyone who eats his flesh  
and drinks his blood  
abides in him...  
it is the Spirit that gives life, he claims.

While Christ has been with the disciples,  
he was the presence of God,  
he was the teacher and proclaimer,  
he was the advocate for God's people.

But once he goes back to the Father,  
Jesus is promising  
that in sending his Spirit  
his presence will be just as real,  
just as noticeable,  
just as powerful.

That's a tall order.

I bet it'll turn out to be Jesus  
...expect it won't turn out to be Jesus,  
it will another Advocate,  
the Helper,  
the Comforter,  
the Paraclete,  
the Spirit of truth.

It sounds like Jesus,  
but won't be Jesus as we have known him.  
For all this confusion,  
the Fourth Gospel offers us  
a clearer understanding of the Spirit  
more than any other New Testament witness,  
because John will describe the Spirit  
as a personal presence—  
the ongoing existence of Jesus  
while he is absent from earth  
and with the Father in Heaven.<sup>3</sup>

When I was younger,  
I can remember Sunday school teachers and my parents  
telling me that Jesus lived in my heart.  
So, naturally I pictured  
a small, dark-haired Jesus  
in a white robe with a purple sash  
that was small enough  
to live in my chest.  
But it isn't Jesus per say

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<sup>3</sup> Frances Taylor Gench pg.109

—it is the Spirit,  
the Spirit of Jesus that lives in my heart!  
And the extraordinary thing,  
is that this Spirit is lodged  
in each and every chest,  
each and every heart.  
This presence will not go away  
as Christ the incarnate Word has,  
but the Spirit will remain  
with us forever.

It is through the Spirit,  
the Advocate that Jesus promises,  
that we as believers can sense  
the presence of Christ,  
whom we have never seen or heard.  
This is what we mean  
when we declare  
that faith is a gift of the Spirit  
—it is only through the working of the Spirit  
that we come to any knowledge  
of the Christ.

And so, the Spirit  
is a personal presence for believers.  
“I will not leave you orphaned,”  
Jesus tells the disciples.  
Which tells us they were feeling anxious  
about him saying,  
*where I am going you cannot go.*

Craig Koester points out,  
“In years to come  
[Jesus] knows that the disciples  
will feel like “orphans.”  
Easter will be a joyous reunion,  
but the resurrection appearances  
will not continue indefinitely.

As the years pass,  
people will be called to believe

in a Jesus they have never seen or heard.  
(Sound familiar?)  
Jesus' words and actions  
will be conveyed [to them] [to us]  
through the tradition of the church..."<sup>4</sup>

What John confirms for us  
about the Spirit then is,  
the Holy Spirit's reality in our personal lives  
AND the Holy Spirit's reality in our communal lives.

So, while I can come to a place of faith  
in my life through the witness and presence  
of the Holy Spirit  
—the true aliveness—  
the full blossoming and fruition  
of the work of the Spirit—  
is in lived out  
in the context of the faithful community.

When Jesus promises,  
<sup>18</sup>*I will not leave **you** orphaned,*  
when Jesus says,  
<sup>25</sup>" I have said these things to **you**  
while I am still with **you**.  
<sup>26</sup>But the Advocate,  
the Holy Spirit,  
whom the Father will send in my name,  
will teach **you** everything,  
and remind **you** of all that I have said to **you**,"  
all those **you's** are really **y'all's**  
—they are plural.

These are things Jesus is saying  
to his disciples and the future church.  
And so, the Spirit is not just  
a private possession.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Koester, Working Preacher <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-1415-21>

<sup>5</sup> Gench, pg. 110



John's Gospel assures us  
that the Advocate  
will teach us everything and remind of us  
of all that Jesus said.

You see the church is birthed—  
*into* ritual  
*and* for proclamation  
in the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will teach us everything  
—meaning we will rely  
on the living presence of the Christ,  
the Spirit in each of us and all of us,  
  
to guide and direct our hearts,  
minds and hands

as we study scripture together  
and discern, together,  
what the Spirit is saying  
and where the Spirit will lead.  
which directs the community  
to a lived proclamation and witness.

And then the Spirit will call us into ritual,  
reminding us to tell the story,  
to remember what the Lord said  
—this is why we come to the table  
regularly as a church;  
this is why we baptize,  
read scripture, worship and pray together.

As a community,  
the Spirit's work is most deeply felt  
and noticed  
by love.  
Jesus says, "If you love me,  
you will keep my commandments" ....  
and what commandment is that?

Earlier in chapter 13 Jesus tells us,  
“I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you,  
you also should love one another.  
**By this** everyone will know  
that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another.”

“If you love me,  
you will keep my commandments.  
And I will ask the Father,  
and he will give you another advocate  
to be with you forever.”

In other words,  
for us to be able to carry out this kind of love  
we need this Advocate.

We know, loving each other  
is all that easy  
and all that hard.  
Love in both the Old and New Testaments,  
is not just something you feel  
—it is something you do.  
And it is something we do  
regardless of how we might feel.  
So, in a way, we don't have to like everybody,  
we just have to love them.<sup>6</sup>

And by doing that kind of love,  
the world will see and know  
the Spirit of Christ.  
There's a much longer sermon  
but let's save that for another day.

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<sup>6</sup> Gench pg. 108

The Advocate that Jesus will send from the Father  
is a helper,  
an intercessor,  
a comforter,  
a proclaimer.

The Greek word  
for the Advocate is, *paraclete*,  
and refers to one  
who is called alongside.

Therefore, the Spirit is to come alongside us,  
both personal and communal.

Abiding with us forever,  
speaking to the heart of you and me  
and finding a bold witness in the community  
that does the hard work  
of staying together,  
inviting others into rituals  
and proclaiming the love of Christ  
to the world.

These chapters in John are to reassure us  
that as followers of Jesus,  
we are called to believe in a life  
shaped not by Jesus' absence,  
but by the unending presence of God;  
that is the life of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

So, let's play a game.  
I'll describe something  
and you tell me what it is.

What can rush in like a mighty wind  
or descend like a dove?  
What looks like bread and juice or water?  
What can enliven Scripture  
and embolden the soul?

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<sup>7</sup> Gench pg. 111

What has four walls and a steeple  
or no walls but hands and hearts?  
What is eternal and enduring,  
a comfort and guide?  
It sounds like Jesus but...

In the name of the Triune God,  
the Three in One  
and the One in Three  
...Amen.