

Sermon: With You in Spirit
Scripture: John 14:21-29
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
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Though we are in the season of Easter still, we go backwards in our story this week to remember the conversation that Jesus had with his disciples in the Gospel of John before he entered into his passion and death. In a couple of weeks we will celebrate Pentecost which officially ends the 50 days of Eastertide. Next week the resurrection appearances of Jesus come to close as he bodily ascends to heaven. So the whole incarnation process that we follow in our worship goes like this: at the beginning of Advent, in December of last year, we read that the Christ child was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit, then we celebrated his birth, his baptism, his life, activities and teachings and then his death and resurrection, his ascension, and finally we come full circle as the Holy Spirit returns to birth the community called the church at Pentecost.

But right now there are still two weeks of Eastertide left and we find ourselves in the Gospel of John chapter 14 in what is known as Jesus' Farewell Discourse with his disciples. And we go back there now because it's there where we read about Jesus telling his disciples what is going to happen after his resurrection and why there will come a point in which he will largely be hidden and unseen, which to cut to the chase is basically that his bodily presence will give way to his Spirit presence. He will not be with us in body but he will and he is even today with us in Spirit.

Don't you know this, that being with someone in Spirit can be as real and as powerful as being with them in person? Have you ever been with someone who is distracted or self-absorbed for whatever reason and so although they are there in person, they are barely there? Sometimes, if we are not careful, we can experience our spousal relationship like that where familiarity breeds an absence in spirit despite bodily presence. We can be that way to our children as well or our children that way with us – around one another but not really present to one another. But also the opposite is true, we can be with one another in Spirit though we are not there in bodily presence. Don't you know people who are with you, who have your back and aware of your life at a particularly deep level whether they are with you or not? Have you ever been told "you have really been on my mind" or "I have really been praying for you," such that you know it's more than just a nice thing being said. We can be powerfully there in Spirit for one another whether we are separated by geography or even by death itself. In fact I imagine we are touched, impacted, encouraged, supported by those only with us in Spirit more than we could possibly know or imagine. And this is what Jesus was promising his disciples: "though I am going to die, I will always be there *with* you and *for* you in Spirit."

But it was mighty hard for the disciples to let go, very painful and scary for them to imagine how they would get along without his physical presence with them. He had really only been around them for 3 years, yet they were changed, awakened and given hope by his presence, convinced also that everything in the world was going to change by his presence as well. And so when Jesus says – "oh, and by

the way, I am going away now. I am going to die. I am going to leave you." The disciples say What? Why? How? They are greatly troubled.

Within chapters 13 and 14 of John you have mostly Jesus' words of farewell but interjected with single line questions from the disciples. Peter saying "Lord, where are you going? And why can I not follow you?" And Thomas saying "Lord, we really don't know where you're going, how can we know the way?" And Philip saying "C'mon, show us God and that will be enough for us." And Judas saying "how is it that you will show yourself to us and not to the world?" They are distressed and a tad bit self-absorbed with what's going to happen to them, what are they supposed to do?

And that's when Jesus says "don't worry my children, I will send you the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to be with you..." in other words "I will be with you in Spirit still though no longer in body." But he doesn't just leave it at that he explains further the nature of this Spirit - "the way you will know my Spirit and the way my Spirit will be with you and work through you is in your keeping my commandment. And what was that? John chapter 13:34, Jesus says "a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples. That's my Spirit at work in the world, the Spirit of Love - Satyagraha - the Love Force.

You know of what I speak, of what Jesus is talking about. You know this Spirit that is Holy in this world. You know the power of love, don't you? And you know how the power of death itself cannot cancel out or lessen or even touch the power of love. If anything death makes

the force of love grow stronger and it burns away the detritus in one's life, leaving us more fully ourselves, right? That's what our scriptures are referring to when they speak of Jesus' Holy Spirit; the generative, fertile, transformative power of Love in this world.

To get a true sense of the power of this Spirit, though, you can't just think about how you love your kids or love your spouse or your parents or your best friends who mean a lot to you. To get a true sense of the power of the Holy Spirit in the world, you gotta be in a situation where there is no love, where there is resentment or hatred even, and then in that situation where one might be most moved to respond with lashing out, with defensive words, with violence to respond instead with Love... Then you can watch and see what happens! Then you can watch the reverberations of the Holy Spirit take over and transform it all.

That's what the disciples did and that's what changed their lives and that's what changed the world.

And when we come to this table that's what we are opening ourselves up to. By ingesting the bread and juice, the body and blood of Jesus, we are opening ourselves to be filled with His Holy Spirit of Love. Do not doubt that his Spirit is with you and take note this week of how it moves and is moving in the ways of love, always in the ways of love. Amen.