**May 25, 2014 – 6th Sunday of Easter**

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Festival of Homiletics

Still processing the huge amount of information

Some radical and some practical ideas – all pretty exciting and thought provoking

 Darkness

 Rethinking our whole approach to doing church

 Even rethinking salvation

Met some great new people

 Karoline Lewis – Expert on John

 Ran into Tony Jones, met Jay Bakker and Brian McLaren

Won’t see me busting out in liturgical dance anytime soon, but some new ideas may creep into my sermons from time to time.

Well worth while!

And now, on to John.

It’s the sixth Sunday of Easter. All of the eggs that have been turned into egg salad are just a colorful memory. The last of the ham has been turned into ham sandwiches and long since eaten. The chocolate bunnies are gone, the Easter grass is recycled, and the baskets are put away for another year. Though our liturgical year says it’s still Easter for another two weeks, emotionally, for many of us, Easter is done.

For all of Lent, while we’re being penitent and contemplative, we’re waiting for the resurrection. During Holy Week, our eyes are turned towards the Cross, but also beyond it to the empty tomb. The long Easter Vigil night gives way to the dawning of the new day of the risen Christ and then finally we welcome that happy morning and hail that festival day.

Which lasts for seven weeks. We might all just be in what Karoline Lewis, whom I mentioned before, calls a Resurrection Rut. Where do we go from here? The good news has happened – Jesus has defeated death and we’re all saved. Game over. Right?

But the problem is that we DO have to go on from here. In the fancy language of salvation, God’s kingdom is already but not yet, and we’re living in the middle of not yet. How do we live into the already while we wait for the not yet? How do we keep the hope and joy alive?

This is where today’s Gospel, and really, the whole Gospel of John comes in. In all three years of our lectionary cycle, in the last three weeks of Easter, the weeks leading up to the Day of Pentecost, we read Jesus’ farewell discourse. The reason we do this is made really clear with today’s reading.

The farewell discourse of Jesus is found in chapters 13 through 17 in the Gospel of John. In these five chapters, Jesus lays out for his disciples, in great detail, what’s in store for him and for them. It’s the foreshadowing of Calvary, but also of the resurrection and of Pentecost.

Today, we heard some of the most comforting words of the entire Gospel. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. I will not leave you orphaned. The world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.”

These are words of promise. These are words of hope.

Once again, I’m not sure our translation, although accurate, does Jesus’ comforting words to his disciples justice. The Greek word that is translated as “Advocate” is *Parakleton,* which is where we get the word Paraclete – or another term for the Holy Spirit. This word is often translated as an advocate or intercessor, so the NRSV isn’t wrong. But it’s also translated as consoler, comforter, or helper, which seems a little closer to what Jesus might have intended here.

An advocate, to me, feels like a legal or official sort of person, like a lawyer or a social worker. They can certainly be helpers, but the word seems kind of cold. Just after Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit, he tells his disciples that they will not be left orphaned. This makes the Paraclete sound more like a parent than a social services or legal representative.

When my dad was 9 months old, his father died suddenly. Then when he was just 5, his mother also died, of a long illness. His mother had come from a large family and when my dad was orphaned, they all vied to be the ones who got to adopt him. They all eventually settled on the person I knew as my Grandma, and my dad was an orphan no more.

This is what this passage feels like to me. As I said, they are words of comfort and hope. But why should we need comfort and hope in the middle of Easter? We’re already filled with comfort and hope from our glorious celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, right?

Once again, we turn to John’s words themselves to give us a clue. The word *parakleton*, like many Greek words, is a compound word made up of two different words. In this case, they are *para*, which means alongside or close beside, and *kaleo*, which means to call or invite.

So Jesus is inviting the Holy Spirit to stand close beside us in our journey, just as he had walked close beside his disciples. So Jesus is not only sending us a comforter, he is inviting the Holy Spirit to stand and work in partnership with us. We are not only not orphans, we are not alone in the work that we still have to do in the world.

It’s that work that causes the Resurrection Rut. Jesus is risen, alleluia, alleluia! We should be joyful! And yet, there’s still so much more for us to do. Death has been ultimately defeated, but there is still death in the world, along with poverty, despair, loneliness, cruelty, and indifference. How is the post resurrection world any different than what went before? There is so much yet to do.

But we’re not in this alone. Jesus promised us his Holy Spirit to comfort us, to guide us, and, most importantly, to join with us in the struggle to bring about God’s justice and peace in the world.

In the weeks and months following Pentecost, I would like us, as a community, to seek guidance from that same Holy Spirit about who we are and who we want to be as a parish. God loves us greatly and he has put us here for a purpose that is far greater than just coming to church on Sundays.

Together, we need to figure out what that purpose is, and seek out ways to fulfill it. Together, as a community, we can make a difference in the world. But always remember, though we may have hard tasks in front of us, we also have the best and most powerful friend in the world right there in the trenches with us. We aren’t orphaned. We aren’t alone.

Amen.