

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Lindale, Texas
6 Easter (Baptisms)
May 21, 2017
John 14:15-21
The Reverend John P. Carr

The Spirit of Truth

Although a very small word, IF, carries a tremendous meaning. Jesus began His comments today with the word IF. IF predicates all that will follow.

If the thing that the IF is referring to is not satisfied, then there is no point going further because the conditions of the IF were not met.

Jesus begins His comments with *"IF you love me."* Let's stop right there.

If we don't love Him then the rest of his comments don't apply.

But He continues, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* IF we love Him, then we keep his commandments. We have established a covenant relationship based on love and keeping the terms of the covenant, the commandments.

But that is not the end. The next sentence might begin with a "then" inserted. *"And, 'then', I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."* Great news! Not only do we enjoy a covenant relationship with Jesus, we will also have a new relationship with His Father and with "another Advocate", the Spirit of Truth.

Tremendous! We now have a new covenant relationship with the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Advocate is also referred to as the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter and the Holy Spirit who will be with us forever. We need fear nothing for as Jesus said, *"He would be with us until the end of the age"* (Mt. 28:20) and now we have *"another Advocate"* who will watch over us.

We might think that we are in charge of things in our lives but really the Holy Spirit is watching over us. I had an idea of what this might look like when I was a kid. You may remember a show called "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" with Marlin Perkins. You recall that the kindly gentleman with the white hair and neat moustache was always accompanied by a strong young man, Jim, who Marlin

would direct to wrestle the alligators, anacondas, and all sorts of dangerous animals while Marlin looked on quietly talking to us about how his young friend Jim would soon be loose from the crushing grip of the python. It was fun to watch if for no other reason but to see if Jim would survive another week with his mentor.

One episode involved a young bear cub who had lost his mother. She had died and he was alone on the path of life. As he ambled down the trail, we see a mountain lion crouching on a rock above the trail waiting to pounce on the little bear cub but he misses his chance. The cub turned downhill to get a drink at the stream.

As luck would have it, a mother bear had lost her cubs and the little bear meets her at the stream and they form a close bond. They needed each other. They live happily on until the following year when the now two year old cub was feeling pretty independent and struck out on his own up the mountain to new territory.

He had not gone far when out jumped the fearsome mountain lion snarling and swiping at the bear cub. It looked bad for the cub but he did what he could to save himself from the claws and teeth of the lion. He stood on his hind legs and raised his paws like his mother had taught him, to look as large as possible, and attempted to roar but only a frightened squeaky kind of roar came out.

Sensing weakness, the lion advanced and the little bear tried to roar again and this time the lion shrank back in fear and ran away. The little bear was quite satisfied with his ability to scare the lion away and as he dropped back to all fours to walk away, the camera pulled back to reveal that the mother bear was standing tall on her hind legs right behind him.

She was watching over him and had protected him in his time of need.

Now, even a young Episcopalian can see the Holy Spirit parallel in that story!

As instructive as that bear story is, there is better news with the Advocate, the Comforter, because the Holy Spirit is with us always. The Holy Spirit arrived as Jesus left. The Holy Spirit is our Advocate *now*, here in our lives surrounding us with that stuff that holds it all together, LOVE.

We demonstrate our love when we keep the relationship, the covenant of love with Jesus by following His lead. When we follow Him we are in a right relationship not only with Jesus but with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Following *can be* easy. Maybe that is what Jesus meant when he said, *“come to me.... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Mt. 11:28)

What makes following difficult is when we don't follow but want to proudly lead. Like the little bear, we want to go it alone at times.

In this we are lost. We are lost in our pride. We want to do it our way. The relationship is broken when we put ourselves in the place of Jesus.

When we try to write the covenant, when we try to make the rules, we make mistakes and fall away from what was intended for us in the love of God. Our pride has gotten in the way of our relationship with God.

When we take the lead we are engaging in a sort of idolatry in which we become the God. *We don't follow*, we make our own way and that leads to problems.

This point was made clear to me in of all places on a mountain trail. I was right behind our guide Solomon hiking over a rough and rugged trail of loose rocks and having a difficult time of it. Solomon, just ahead of me was swinging along without so much as a stumble while I was tripping over loose rocks. He finally looked back and smiled that gentle smile of his and said, *“step where I step, walk where I walk, follow me.”*

There was a lot of theology in that sentence! I began to step only where he stepped and the going smoothed out immediately. As the clattering of loose rocks under me subsided, he again looked back and smiled as if to say, *“see, you don't have to pick your own way, just follow me.”* It was a great lesson.

The climb was still difficult but by following Solomon closely rather than cutting my own trail I was able to manage that rocky path.

It occurred to me as I walked along that life with Jesus is like that.

Following Jesus is not necessarily without difficulty, pain, exhaustion or despair *but if* we follow in his footsteps, we can make it. He has promised this and He always keeps His promise.

At the end of the day of closely following on the heels of Solomon, I arrived in camp and I noticed that I was covered in the fine volcanic dust that Solomon had stirred up as he walked. I commented on the dust to him. He said that was good because *“the one who has the dust has followed closely.”*

Solomon scored another theological direct hit!

When we follow Jesus closely, we will experience some of what He experienced. *We will get dusty.*

We will experience some of the highs and lows of His life. Like Him, we will experience temptation, sorrow, pain, frustration, betrayal and in the end joy. As Jesus departed this earth he entrusted His covenant of love with us to the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth. It is through this covenant of love that Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit are revealed.

We will witness the baptisms today of Beth, Bryce, Madilynn and Beverly, and we will reaffirm our Baptismal Vows professing our faith in God the Father, Jesus the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We will then answer five questions about how we will live. These questions could be summed up as, will you continue to keep the covenant to **love God** and **love your neighbor**?

This love is the stuff of God that holds our world together. Love is not from science, politics, or engineering. It is only from the Spirit of Truth. Love is a spiritual thing. This love binds us to our God in Holy Baptism. We make the pledge to share in the covenant of love that is sealed by the Holy Spirit and we are marked as Christ's own forever.

In the waters of Baptism

- we are **buried** with Christ in His death,
- we **share** in His resurrection and
- we are **reborn** in the Holy Spirit.
- Then we **follow** His commandments because **we love Him** who first loved us

Now, it is up to us to go out *in faith* to be the hands of Christ in the world, one person at a time, one day at a time.

That old song, “Day by Day” says it well,

Day by day, O dear Lord three things I pray, to

- *see* you more clearly,
- *love* you more dearly,
- *follow* you more nearly, day by day.

Amen