

Easter 6- Year A- John 14:15-21  
(May 28-29, 2011)- Intern Travis Wilson

I was talking with one of the families who is staying here this week for Family Promise and the oldest son asked me what was wrong with my eye. I asked him which one he meant, and he said that he meant my right eye, saying something about it not being straight and looking weird. It has become second nature to me to talk about my vision, so I answered him saying that I was blind in the right eye and couldn't see anything out of that right eye. I told him I didn't see too well out of my left eye either and I couldn't see anything that required peripheral vision or depth perception. After my explanation, you could tell that he was processing this and he decided to walk around with one of his eyes covered. When he was through walking around our upstairs Sunday School space, he came back to me and said, "this is hard. You miss a lot of stuff when you can only see out of one eye, I can't even see some of the things that are right in front of me anymore." I think that he hit the nail on the head with that observation. Sometimes, it is really hard to see some of the things that are right in front of me.

I have come to the conclusion this week that I don't think that is just my problem; I think even people with great vision have trouble seeing things that are right in front of them as well. Some people joke that they must have had their blinders on when they fail to see something that another person thought they should see. This happens all the time- we miss things that are, more often than not, right under our noses. Watch a TV show or read a mystery novel and the detectives will often say that the clue has been under their noses all along, but until they've had some kind of encounter that causes them to see something fresh, they missed it. Sometimes when we're driving, we can get so preoccupied with a song on the radio or we can replay a conversation in our heads with a friend and we somehow miss seeing the red stop light in front of us. I think my new friend has it right, sometimes we can often miss the very things that are right in front of us.

All of our scripture readings today seem to also agree that we miss things, and even people, who are right in front of us. In our first reading from Acts, Paul is giving a speech to some thinkers and philosophers on the Areopagus, the hill where religion and philosophy is debated in Athens and also the site of the town council. He tells them that people would “search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us.” There is a sense of searching for, even groping, for God. Groping for anything implies that the object for which we seek is quite near. Our second lesson from 1 Peter tells us that even in the midst of suffering, we are not far from God’s presence. Jesus also suffered for sins, and because Jesus suffered, there is hope for us who may also suffer along the way. It is common in the midst of suffering to want to know when it will end, and why we have to endure it. It is in those times, just like Luke points out in Acts, that we grope for God, we search for meaning and hope; and a lot of the time, we don’t realize how close it is.

Lastly, we come to our lesson from the gospel of John where Jesus talks to his disciples about an advocate; one who would be with them long after Jesus is gone. This is part of what we call the Farewell Discourse in John. This part of the story continues from last week where Jesus is going to prepare a place for the disciples, and us, and will draw all of us to himself. The story also continues from chapter 13 where Jesus eats the Last Supper with the disciples and washes their feet in a most intimate act of love. Also in chapter 13, Jesus tells them that they are to love one another just as he has loved them. What seems clear for us throughout the gospel of John is what Jesus is about, and that is love. Jesus says, “if you love me, you will keep my commandments” that is you will love one another in the same way you love me.

Jesus then goes on in our lesson today to talk about another advocate whom God will send to be with the disciples forever. This advocate is the Spirit of truth that the world cannot see because they do not know the Spirit. However, this Spirit of truth is the one that abides with the disciples, and us, because we know, we fully grasp this Spirit. The Greek word for Spirit here is the word *parakletos*. It is a word that

gets translated as advocate, helper, comforter, and even counselor. Literally, we would translate the word as one who calls alongside, or one that comes alongside. The Spirit, this advocate, is given to the disciples to be their helper and a comfort; yet the interesting thing is that the Spirit is the second advocate. John tells us that Jesus says that God will send another advocate, and this means that there is already a first advocate, and this one is Jesus. Jesus is the one who is an advocate for them already, he is the one that points the way to the Father, to God; and he is the one who loves them just as God loves them.

It isn't an easy day today to be a preacher, and I think the gospel writer John knows this. It is hard to talk about things that we haven't actually seen. As much as his words in our gospel lesson today are for Jesus' disciples, John writes these words much later after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. John is writing these words to a community that indeed has not seen Jesus and they are trying to figure out what living life as a Christian is like. John's community is similar to the disciples' community when Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned, I am coming to you." The disciples were about to lose Jesus to death and they were going to be left alone, without their teacher, their leader, and their advocate. John's community, and even we ourselves, are like orphans too- we have not seen Jesus; we have not even seen the Spirit. Orphan is a good word today to describe us, we are like people who have lost a parent and sometimes we don't have a clue what to do.

Yet, we aren't alone, even though we can't quite see or grasp that sometimes. We like the disciples and like John's community are people who have been given the gift of the advocate, the Spirit. Jesus tells his disciples that after his death God will send the Spirit to be with them. The Spirit, the advocate, doesn't replace Jesus, but continues Jesus' work. Jesus reveals the love of God that takes on human flesh and suffers for the sin of a world that is separated from God. Since the Spirit comes after Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit remains with the disciples and reveals to the community of faith the risen Jesus and God.

We also have received this advocate, this Spirit. In the waters of baptism we die with Jesus to ourselves and to the power of sin that separates us from God; and like Jesus, we are raised and given a new life filled with the presence of God and the Holy Spirit. Yet, we still struggle sometimes to know this Spirit and advocate. We struggle with seeing a world that is full of God's love, a world that is no longer alienated from God. We see a world that seems filled with terror, destruction, disaster, greed, separation of families and relationships, and a host of other conditions. We grope for God, for the advocate, in the midst of that world; but as Paul tells us in Acts today, "indeed [they] are not very far from each one of us."

The good news for us today is that the advocate, the Holy Spirit, the one who makes Jesus known is indeed right here. The Spirit is an advocate who looks a lot like Jesus, and John promises us that the Spirit abides with us and indeed will be in us. So if that is the case, then the Spirit is right here! Look around you in this place today, no really, go ahead and look. The people gathered around you today are people who are with us in community bearing the presence of Christ to us and to the world. Behold, the Spirit is here. We can see the Spirit when we take time to care for folks that don't have much- our Family Promise families and other homeless people, people that are hungry, people who are distressed. We see the Spirit when people accompany us to medical appointments, when people visit us in the hospital, when people stand up for us when we're down and out, when people give us rides around town because we can't drive, when we're in need of an encouraging word, hug, or smile and we get one- even from a stranger.

Open your eyes today to see what has been right under our noses all along. Open your eyes to see that we live in a world that is no longer orphaned; we live in a world where God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are ever present, they are indeed right here. We do in fact know the Spirit as Jesus says in our gospel lesson. We know the Spirit because the Spirit has looked a lot like you and like me. As a community of believers in this place, the Spirit looks a lot like all of us when we love one another as Jesus first loved us. Go from this place indeed to love and serve God,

but go to love and serve others as well. We are equipped and strengthened to love and serve others because the Holy Spirit abides in us. Yet as we go from this place into the world, I encourage you to watch as others go out the doors in front of you. What you are watching is the Holy Spirit going forth into the world to reveal to all the love and life of the risen Jesus.

Amen.