

## **Sixth Sunday of Easter May 17, 2020**

### **Acts 17:22-31, 1 Peter 3:13-22, John 14:15-21**

I might very well be alive because my wife Karen, advocated for me. It was Fall of 2016 and I had recently undergone shoulder surgery to clean out the results of playing football all those years ago. My recovery had been going well for about 10 days, but then I began to experience pain in my back under my right shoulder blade. It felt like a muscle spasm and was becoming excruciating whenever I moved or breathed deeply. Just getting up to go to the bathroom was an ordeal. I had Karen get some muscle relaxants from the doctor but all that did was help me to sleep. I woke up still in pain

When she came home from work, I told her I needed to go to the ER. I couldn't handle this pain one more night. After an excruciating trip to Mercy ER we got to the intake and they took my history and temp. I remember the nurse looking twice at the reading. I had a fever and was admitted into the ER quickly under sepsis protocol.

After describing my surgery and the pain to the ER doc I was taken for an X-Ray-not fun in my condition. The doc came back later and said I had pneumonia in the left lung. Okay, but what about the pain in the right side. I was getting pretty wiped out by this point, but I remember Karen pushing the doctor and nurses about that pain in the right side. My wife, beside me, advocating, speaking out for me.

It worked, the doc had me taken for a CT with contrast. Not long after I returned from that he came back in with two nurses who began starting IV's. Not only did I have pneumonia in both lungs, I had pulmonary embolisms (blood clots) in both

lungs. If those had remained undetected, they could have killed me. Except, I had an advocate. One who spoke for me.

Jesus, in the Gospel today, is finishing his last conversation with the disciples on that Maundy Thursday and tells them that he will ask his Father to send them another Advocate to be with them forever.

The word used for Advocate means someone who stands close beside another, who speaks on their behalf. In our modern society an advocate can be anyone from a spouse or friend who speaks for their loved one in the hospital, to lobbyists for particular programs or spending in the legislature, to people who stand up for the rights of those who cannot speak for themselves, in court in particular.

Now, note that Jesus says that he will ask his Father to send another Advocate. It implies that Jesus is also an Advocate. I think when most of us hear Advocate applied to Jesus and the Holy Spirit we think- oh, these are the ones who speak for our care to God. They Advocate for us before God so that God will be merciful to us. Now, there is some language in scripture and certainly in our theology to read it that way, but if you look at the Gospel of John, heck if you look at any of the Gospels, I'm not sure that's how it works.

John 3:16 for God so loved the world, that he sent his only Son Jesus- not to condemn the world but to save it. God, in Jesus, has already shown that God's desire towards the world is to be merciful. For those of us who stand on this side of the resurrection we have already received God's abundant gift of love that creates new life in us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Why would we need Jesus and the Holy Spirit to speak to God for us?

What if, both Jesus but more so the Holy Spirit, were Advocates for God to us? Ones who come to a world that cannot see or know God and proclaim the truth,

that in Jesus Christ we meet God and know first-hand the love God has for all of us. And it is through this proclamation that sight and knowledge become possible and through whom faith comes to be.

That kind of flips things on its head, but it makes sense. We don't need an advocate to get God to love and forgive us. God has already done so. The biblical story of God's continuing pursuit of humanity shows this. No, we need an Advocate to speak that truth to us in a way that we can receive. For as Jesus points out- the world- is so caught up in sin that we cannot receive that Holy Spirit, not on our own. Because our sin blinds us to the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Keeps us from seeing them in the same way we might examine a car, or a new phone, seeking to understand it for what it is and how it works. And because we cannot see in that way, we cannot get to know God in Jesus through personal experience.

We need an Advocate. One who speaks on behalf of God, who can make us see the truth.

And once we do. Once we see Jesus and all that he means. Once we experience the Holy Spirit, that truth will never leave. Because it sets a tent up in our hearts, it abides- dwells with us. And we cannot go back to that old way of not seeing.

And then we become the Advocates for God. For the Spirit dwells within us and that is the work of the Spirit, is it not? To advocate, speak out for God. It is also the work of the faithful.

Paul in our reading from Acts is an Advocate for God and a darn clever one at that. He does not rail against the Athenians for their worship of many gods. Rather, he compliments them on their devotion and points out one particular god, the unknown god. He says, I know who this is! This is the one who has created all things. And this God does not live in shrines built by humans or need anything

from us. No! Rather, this is the one who gives us daily bread. This is the one who we continually search for, though God is not far away. If we could but see, God is right beside us. Paul Advocates for God and speaks the truth of who God is and God's desire to be in a loving relationship with all of creation.

The author of 1 Peter reminds us that we should always be ready to make a defense to anyone who demands an accounting of the hope that is in us. We should always be ready to Advocate for God.

Even the promises we make when we affirm our baptism points us to this role- one promise is to strive to proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ through word and deed.

Now this might cause some anxiety. Is your heart beating a bit more? Are you breathing a little harder? What!? Me speak to others about God? I don't know enough! What if I get it wrong or can't make a good argument?

Well, slow down. As Advocates, all we are called to do is give an account of the hope that is in us. To proclaim the truth that we know. It's like the man born blind in John 9. When he is brought before the court and asked who he thinks Jesus is, he responds by telling what he knows. What his experience of Jesus has been. "Hey, I don't know if he is the Messiah or not, all I know is I was blind and since I met him- now I see." He bears witness- advocates- for God in Jesus, just by telling his own story.

Note what isn't required of him. To transform people's minds or hearts.

This is part of the reason why I hang with the Christians who happen to be Lutheran. We believe that when we Advocate for God. When we speak the truth of the hope that is in us because of Jesus Christ. When we proclaim the love of

God for the whole world as shown through Jesus. We believe that the Holy Spirit works through those words to transform people. To open their eyes that they might see and know. And the job of opening eyes, of transforming people is not ours. It's Gods! In God's own time.

Our calling is to speak, to Advocate for God. And trust the Holy Spirit will do the rest of the work. This is something the sower knows in the parable of the Sower. She spreads the seed everywhere- on rocky ground, the path, among the weeds. And trusts that where there is good soil, God in the Holy Spirit will make that seed take root and grow. All she has to do is spread the seed.

Now, I don't know about you, but I can speak about my life! I'm an expert in that. I can tell people about things that excite me, that motivate me. I can listen as they do the same with me. I can share my experience of walking with God. Of the love that fills me and the love that I have for God.

And the gift of this calling to be Advocates- is that it brings us back in touch with the Jesus who has saved us. It reminds us that the Holy Spirit abides with us always. It fills us again with the knowledge that God so loved me, loved you- that God sent Jesus, the visible sign of God's love and commitment to you- even when you could not see or know the fullness of what God had done.

It reminds us, that when we meet and love Jesus, we meet and love God. And we know firsthand the transforming power of that love in our lives. A love that turns us into Advocates for God. A love that leads us to keep Jesus' commandments- which in the Gospel of John is pretty simple- love each other and love God.

I pray we all would hear again the voice of the Advocate speaking to us of God's love. And that we might be transformed by that love- so that we would love God and our neighbors. And go to speak the hope that is in us.