

YEAR C, Easter 06

Acts 16:9-15, Psalm 67, Revelation 21:10, 21-22:5, John 14:23-29

John 14:23-29

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup> "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

<sup>28</sup> You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

### KEEPING HIS WORD

Today's gospel from John must have been a very challenging day for the disciples. Jesus tells the disciples, that he is going away. He is going somewhere that they cannot go. And they will see him no more. I can imagine the fallen hearts of the disciples that day. This man, this friend of theirs, their teacher, would be leaving them. Jesus had told them about the Kingdom of God that was at hand. These disciples had left their families, they had left their friends, and they had left their homes, to be the followers of Jesus. But with Jesus gone, what would they do? How would they carry on?

Although Jesus is leaving, he tells the disciples that he will not be leaving them all alone. He will be with them, through the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises that both the Father and the Son, will come to them, and abide with them – that is, make their home inside of them.

But there is part of today's gospel that troubled me. Jesus says "those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Jesus goes on to say that whoever does not love him does not keep his words." This sounds rather like a condition – or a bargain. If we keep his word, the Father and the Son will love us, and will abide in us. That part sounds really good. But I guess the opposite must also be true. That if we do not keep his words, we must not love him, and he will not abide in us.

And I wonder, what happens if we do love Jesus, but forget to keep his word? Or maybe, even though we love Jesus, we make mistakes, or we make bad choices. Does that mean that God will not love us? Jesus says, that through the Holy Spirit, he will always be there for us. But it sounds to me like that depends on us keeping his word. And that is what troubled me. There are times that I know I am not good at doing what I am supposed to be doing. Frankly, there are times when I am just plain not good.

So I wonder what Jesus means, when he says that if we love him, we will keep his word? I have spent quite some time, wondering about this. And worrying a bit too. And here is what I think I have figured out.

It is about keeping God's word – which is a very different thing from keeping OUR word – our promise to be good and our promise to do good as God would have us do. We should try, in earnest, every day, to be the people that God knows that we can be. But God's love for us, his dwelling in us, is not dependent on that. Thank you, God! Jesus said to keep HIS word – nor our word. And look at what God's word for us in today's gospel. Jesus' word – his promise – is that he will not leave us. Period. He will not leave us alone. Jesus may go, but he leaves his peace with us. Wherever Jesus may be, his peace will be with us. He will be there for us when our hearts are troubled, and we become afraid. We may not be such good promise keepers. But the good news is that God will always keep his promise to us. To be there always - to soothe our troubles and calm our fears. Keeping God's word means remembering – always remembering – his promise to us.

I now read the first sentence from today's gospel quite differently. "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." In loving Jesus, we are keeping his word. When we love Jesus, the God the Father loves us back. The love of God is not a prize to be earned. The love of God is a gift, a grace that is freely given.

Given without our asking, and before we could ask. And our response is to love in return.

God says that he will always be there for us, and we know that God will keep this promise. But there have been times in my life, and maybe yours too, when I did not know that God was there. There have been times of struggle, and times of anguish, when I have looked for God, and could not find him. I cannot really explain these times. But I know they can be painful. And maybe other people don't have these dry times, when our souls seem so arid, and God seems so far away. For what it is worth, here are three things that have helped me in these times. The first is, that the bad times don't last forever. Whatever we are going through, it will come to an end. Even a bad ending, and that does happen, clears the way for something new to begin. Many, many, many is the time that something surprising and wonderful comes, after we have been through something awful. The second thing is to read the scriptures. There are all sorts of ways to do to this. But particularly when you are going through rough times, this will help you re-connect with God. The Bible was written, to speak to you and to me, in our own time and in our own circumstances. When we read the stories of how God was present in the lives of his people in the Bible, that reminds us of how God is present in our lives today. The third thing is to pray. There have been times in my life, when this was the hardest thing for me to do. It felt wooden, and it felt lifeless. I felt like I was talking to myself, and listening to

empty silence. And when I was through, I felt just as empty as when I started. But I kept praying anyway. And before too long, I was reunited with God.

The disciples in today's gospel were facing a big change. Jesus was leaving. And it would be their job, with Jesus gone, to tell the world the good news of God in Jesus Christ. In this time of change, and facing an unknown future, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will always be with them – to guide them, to teach them and to be their companion. Jesus gives them something the world cannot give – himself and his peace.

At times, we too will face a future that is unknown, challenges that are daunting, and things that make us fearful. But the promise of Jesus is just as much for us as it was for the disciples. God is with you. God loves you and makes his home within you. Be confident in God's promise to you. Live your lives without fear. Your creator has made you holy, and has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road, and may God's blessing be with you always. Amen.

