

A sermon preached at Zion Episcopal Church  
6th Sunday of Easter, Year A  
May 21, 2017  
The Rev. Lucy D. LaRocca  
Text: John 17:1-11

One thing I can say with some certainty, is that we all go through rough times in our lives. Times of loss or conflict, and perhaps we have experienced times when we have found ourselves short on resources; whether financial or emotional. How we get through times like these often depends on the support we receive from others.

Jesus offered such support on the night before his crucifixion. He gently broke the news to his disciples that he would soon be leaving them. He phrased this not as something that would happen to him, but as a difficult choice that he had made. But he reassured his friends that they would be able to get through the rough days ahead because the love they shared would not go away; they would be able to abide in that love forever. And would be with them in a new way.

Though he would soon be hidden from sight, he would send them the Comforter. The word Jesus used, Paracletos --is often translated "Advocate." It can be used for the one who advocates for you before a court of law. And it refers to one who brings help, consolation, comfort, and encouragement. The most basic meaning of the word is to "come along side another."

Jesus then added another promise, perhaps the most startling promise of them all: you will know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you. He will be in you, Jesus promises, and I will be in you. And this promise is not just for the beloved disciples who walked with him from the beginning, the ones who heard his teachings and witnessed his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. It is for all who love him.

Jesus is no longer limited by his physicality, by geography or by time. Because of the coming of the paraclete, the same Jesus who walked alongside his 1<sup>st</sup> century disciples can walk alongside each one of us; inspiring us and helping us through the good times and the rough times. And not just walking alongside, abiding. With Christ abiding in us, we too, can carry out God's work in the world. Each of us who love God can function as paracletes to each other by coming along side one another; in times of celebration, in times of uncertainty, and in times of loss. The one's who follow Jesus are to carry on his work in the world with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In today's gospel, Jesus is preparing the disciples for this shift. Those who have followed ...will become those who are sent into the world as bearers of God's love. Disciples becoming Apostles. Bishop Laura Ahrens is fond of talking about our lives as both disciples and apostles when she meets with confirmands and when she comes for parish visitations. She reminds us

that we are called, first to be disciples of Jesus, to gather to listen and learn from his teachings, to follow him, to stay near to him and watch the things that he is doing. And then we are called to be apostles. We are sent out into the world as active witnesses to the truth of Jesus. Each and every one of us.

Because today is Rogation Sunday, I want to take a few moments here to talk about the meaning of Rogation Days. Rogation Days are set aside for prayer the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday prior to Ascension Day. (which is this Thursday.) Rogation comes from the Latin, rogare, to ask. Rogation Days are for the express purpose asking God through prayer and fasting to spare the people from catastrophe, especially famine.

In more agricultural settings in the past and continuing today in England the vicar of the church will lead the people in procession from farm to farm within the geographical boundaries of the parish. The so-called beating of the bounds. At each farm the priest blesses the animals and newly planted crops asking God for the right amount of sun and rain so that the people will receive a bountiful harvest and be spared from hunger in the coming winter.

I have to admit, that being the church geek that I am, I have fantasized about doing this here in North Branford. It sounds fun. And it would turn some heads, wouldn't it, to have an acolyte carrying a cross and all of us marching in procession down route 22 to bless the farms? But there are some problems, traffic of course, and because Zion is one of those parishes with members from several different towns, it would take us all summer to do this as a group.

But what if we take the idea of apostleship more seriously, and it is all of us, not just the priest, who are sent out as instruments of blessing. Instead of a quaint procession out of another time and place, each one of us can bless our neighbors and pray for the eradication of hunger.

On Friday, our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, sent out an invitation for us to use these Rogation Days as a season of prayer, fasting and advocacy. Today is the Global Day of Prayer to End Famine, day to respond to people suffering from food and water shortages. Beyond Wednesday, the bishops have called for a fast day on the 21st of each month through December 2018. The 21st of each month is significant, because by that date, the majority of food assistance benefits for that month will have run out. This means that the last week of the month is usually the hungriest week in America. The bishops have extended this call out of concern for proposed deep cuts to programs that are vital to hungry people struggling with poverty. They summon our churches to practices of spiritual devotion that undergird a discipline of public witness on behalf of the neighbor.

Next Sunday, at 11:30, I hope you will all join me for Hunger 101, a presentation by the Ct Food Bank so we can learn more about this issue and what we can do about it. Your prayers and

fasting, your advocacy for those who are experiencing hunger or who lack clean water will be seeds of blessing worthy of the finest Rogation Day procession.

Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky, in describing the Trinity, affirmed Christ as the reflection of the Father. He went on to say that if we want to see a reflection of the Holy Spirit we should look to the Church. "You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

Thanks be to God, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. (Eph. 3:20) Amen.