

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
The 6th Sunday of Easter (6A) - May 10, 2026
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, CT

Acts 17: 22-31; Psalm 66: 7-18; 1 Peter 3: 13-22; John 14: 15-21

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.” †

In today’s Gospel, we hear a portion of the ‘Farewell Discourse’— Jesus saying goodbye to his disciples, his friends, before his ascension to heaven (which we celebrate next Thursday). And he promises the coming of ‘the Advocate, the *Parakletos*, at Pentecost (which we’ll celebrate in a few weeks). It’s good to hear this as we try to make sense and survive in this midst of a frightening and chaotic world; we are not left orphaned.

First, consider the story in Acts today. We have Paul in Athens, the center of philosophy that shaped most of the Western world. As he wanders around the city, he finds all kinds of different faiths, and concludes that the people of Athens are very religious-minded people. As if to confirm this, he’s invited to meet with the Aeropagus, a council of the most respected and distinguished thinkers in the city (today it might include great civic leaders, university chairs and college presidents, and esteemed religious leaders). He meets with this distinguished group to explain to them what *his faith* is all about.

Now absorb what’s happening while reflecting on the first letter of Peter we just heard. In it we are told that when we have the opportunity to speak about our faith, we should do so readily but with “gentleness and reverence” that is, with respect. I must admit, when I think about Paul’s teaching techniques, I don’t immediately go to ‘gentleness and respect’ as much as ‘sharp and intense.’

And yet, in Acts we are told that it was with gentleness and respect that Paul approached those in power in Athens. He affirmed their keen interest in religion, even quoting directly from one of their most respected poets. Rather than exclaiming that they’ve got it all wrong, he links his message to what he has observed of their own religious practice. His mention of the shrine to “an unknown God” enables him to suggest that the faith he is there to preach is not something strange and new, but rather the missing knowledge of a faith that is already within their experience.

That quote from the Greek poet Epimenides, “In God we live and move and have our being,” helps him to explain that no one, regardless of what they might or might not believe, no one is entirely cut off from God and that everyone is under the influence of God. That’s often hard to accept in our present post-pandemic, war-prone circumstances, living in a world that seems so

divided and individualized. To live, to move, to be, all surrounded by God and supported by God. That same argument to the Athenians is appropriate for us today. Paul says he cannot 'take' Christ to them (show them Christ) because Christ is already there among them! In God they live and move and have their being. This shouldn't really come as a surprise to us. We believe in a God who takes on flesh among us, who embodies himself in places he is not always welcomed. We believe in a God who is present in ordinary things, in Bread and wine, reaching out to us and asking us to offer ourselves in return. So, it should not be a surprise that this God who is not far from us, is also present among *all* people, whoever they may be spiritually... reaching out to them in the ordinariness of the world.

Henri Nouwen, the great Dutch Catholic spiritual writer, once said: "When we have met our Lord in the silent intimacy of our prayer, then we will also meet him in the camp, in the market, and in the town square. But when we have not met him in the center of our hearts, we cannot expect to meet him in the busyness of our daily lives." For we believe in a God who comes to us in this world, even while we are set in our own ways and seek our own will, even when we seem unwilling to change.

Now let's go back to the Gospel passage, where we hear a lot about *love*. For the author of this 4th Gospel, the true test of love is obedience. Jesus' obedience to God, our obedience to Jesus. Following Jesus' command, 'to love one another as I have loved you' is all about doing what is right, doing everything that points toward God. When we love others, we love God. When we love others, we are doing God's will here and now! This is at the heart of who we are as Christian community, as Christ Church Quaker Farms. And it makes me wonder why many Christians around the world proclaim this same love, yet seem to spread violence and hate. The kind of love mentioned in the 4th Gospel is not emotional or reactive, it is all encompassing and unconditional. This is the love that binds us to God. Jesus promised he would not leave us orphaned but would ask the Father to send us a helper, a comforter— a *parakletos*.

In other Greek writings, a *parakletos* is someone who is called in to give support. Someone called in to give advice in a difficult situation. In a military context, it's someone who can counsel and promote courage to depressed and exhausted soldiers, helping them to cope with dire situations and struggle on. In other situations, it's someone who acts as a witness or counsel in a court hearing (an advocate). A *parakletos* is one who helps in time of need. The original English authorized version of the Bible (KJV) translated by John Wycliff, translates this word as 'comforter,' based on the Latin translation '*fortis*' from which we get the word comfort. It meant more at the time of his translation than it does now. Now to comfort is all about helping in time of sorrow, but the *parakletos* is one who helps in *all* kinds of situations. One who helps others to cope.

For some of us, that may be our Mothers, who've nurtured us. For others, therapists in modern psychiatric practice, those who help others cope with overwhelming things and stress in the world. That's precisely the role of the *parakletos*, the Holy Spirit, The Advocate— to take on our inadequacies and simply help us to cope with this world!

Taken together, all these scriptures reinforce the fact that God comes to us, as promised— via the *parakletos* and reassures us that he is always here and always has been, surrounding us. Jesus comes to us. Whenever we gather as a community and re-member Him in the Eucharist. Every time we love each other, every time we help someone in need, every time we strive to follow God's will and promote what is just and good in this world. Our God surrounds us! Jesus comes, whenever we love as he loves us!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! †