

May 17, 2020
Rev. Kerry Smith

John 14:15-21 I Will Not Leave You
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 14:15-21 New Revised Standard Version

“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. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

A few weeks ago the McMillin family had an adventure. Brant, Jen, Morgan and Ian loaded up in the car and when they got to their first fork in the road, Brant asked, “Right or left?” They ended up in McKinney at the Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary. They ended their day by driving through Wanna Burger in Sherman. The McMillins didn’t know where they were going and they had no destination. Even though they were technically lost, they reconnected with each other and they had a great time doing it. It feels counterintuitive but feeling lost is one of the best ways to find yourself. It seems like in our world right now, we need to stop grasping for certainty and instead welcome the unknowing and unknowable.¹ We might feel lost, but we are not abandoned.

When we feel lost, when we feel uncertain, it is in those times that we reconnect with who we are. We are beloved children of God, first and foremost. That is the most important thing about us. Jesus says, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” Last week at the end of worship, Robert played Felix Mendelssohn’s beautiful piece, *But the Lord is Mindful of His Own*. Robert shared with us afterwards the words, “But the Lord is mindful of His own, He remembers His children. Bow down before Him, ye mighty, for the Lord is near us.” We are not abandoned.

We have left our comfortable and comforting world and we are walking into something that feels entirely new. It is really disorienting. We cannot make easy predictions about what is to come. It is frightening but it can also be freeing. If we open ourselves to the warm arms of God, we can be free to explore our new reality. We are not abandoned.

Here at Greenland Hills we say that our church is open and affirming, creative and compassionate. We value community, outreach, music, and you. We are trying to be creative in figuring out how to maintain what we value while also being as safe as possible. The only thing that we seem to know for sure is that there is no roadmap for what lies ahead. There is no path to follow and there is no blueprint to study. We have to get comfortable with being lost, and with feeling all of the grief, pain and joy that comes with that disorientation.² We are leaving home, and heading into the unknown, but we know the way and we are not abandoned.

A few days ago I watched *The Martian*. Matt Damon plays an astronaut who lives by himself on Mars for 560 days. He has to figure out how to survive because there is no other option. He says in the movie, “At some point, everything’s gonna go south on you and you’re going to say, this is it. This is how I end. Now you can either accept that, or you can get to work. That’s all it is. You just begin. You do the math. You solve one problem and you solve the next one, and then the next. And if you solve enough problems, you get to come home.”

¹ Cameron Trimble talks about this concept that she learned from her friend Elaine Gibson.

² Cameron Tribble shared these words in her email dated May 14, 2020

In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment and Jesus says to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. Then Jesus says the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. In *The Martin*, astronaut Matt Damon is wondering why everyone is willing to help him and he concludes, “Every human being has a basic instinct: to help each other out. If a hiker gets lost in the mountains, people will coordinate a search. If a train crashes, people will line up to give blood. If an earthquake levels a city, people all over the world will send emergency supplies. This is so fundamentally human that it's found in every culture without exception. Yes, there are people who just don't care, but they're massively outnumbered by the people who do.” We are not alone.

When I see people bring food for the Emanuel Community Center protein drive or see people pick up trash that isn't even theirs, when I see us reach out in love and concern to check in with one another, I think of Jesus' words, “In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.” It is the great mystery of our Christian faith, the resurrection, but it is why we are called Easter people.

We are Easter people because our identity is shaped by the idea that goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death. We believe that God is constantly making all things new. We find meaning not in what we own or what we earn, but in how we reach out to one another in love and in service. It is hope transformed into action. The words that we read in John's Gospel remind me of when Jesus washed the disciples' feet in the chapter before, John 13. After Jesus finished he said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Jesus had shown his disciples abundant love throughout the entirety of his ministry. When Jesus washes their feet he shows them that the love that he was talking about is distinctive. Jesus washes the feet of Judas who is about to betray him. Jesus washes the feet of Peter who is about to deny him. Through his actions Jesus shows that we are called to love even those who will hurt us and abandon us.

Jesus understands his own ministry as being the one who is called to come alongside you. He is helper, comforter, counselor, encourager, companion, advocate, and intercessor. We sing at Christmas, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. Emmanuel means God with us. In his words in John 14, Jesus is saying that the God who has always been present promises to be with us always. The Spirit abides with you and the Spirit will be in you. It is a promise for each one of us. When we are afraid and uncertain about the future, when we feel lost, the Spirit is with us. It is the Spirit who reminds us of our identity as children of God, as sheep who recognize the voice of our shepherd³. We are not alone. We are not abandoned.

Why is it so easy when we are stressed or frightened, for us to forget that God is with us? Why do we forget that when we feel unsure about the future and it feels like everything has been turned upside down, the Spirit comes along side us and reminds us of Jesus' promise to be with us and for us. When we doubt our worth in God's eyes, the Spirit is there to remind us who we are and whose we are. We are worthy of God's attention and love. When we can ground ourselves in that truth, then we remember that we can not only survive whatever challenge comes, but we can flourish. We are not alone.

We are worthy of God's attention and love. There might be days when we need to remind ourselves of that truth and there might be days when we need to remind others of that truth. We are called to comfort, help, encourage, counsel, and lift up others. Jesus commissions us to do

³ <https://www.davidlose.net/2020/05/easter-6-a-spirit-work/>

this work of the Spirit. It is a scary time right now, but it is also a time when we are seeing people make profound sacrifices and when we see people being incredibly generous. What is the difference you are being called to make today? Who can you reach out to today to remind them that they are a beloved child of God?

Hope helps us to stay present, to be grounded in the truth of God's love for us no matter what is going on. Sometimes we try to hold on to what is comfortable so tightly that we can't see the new thing that God is doing. We have to let go, we have to surrender, and when we do we find hope. I have been sitting outside a lot lately. As the wind blows, I feel God's presence all around me. I believe God is within us and between us. I believe that God is like the air we breathe, filling us and giving us life. Where do you see God today?

I want to invite you to do an activity. Write down some things that you have really missed because of COVID-19. Then, make a list of the things you are grateful for that you would not have experienced if life had been normal. We have sorrows and joys, and in both of them, God is with us. I keep thinking of the McMillin's adventure where they got to a fork in the road and then decided to go left or right. No matter which way they went, God was with them. Where can you see God moving? God will never leave us, because Jesus lives, we also will live. We are not alone. We are not abandoned. Thanks be to God, Amen.