

There are reasons to believe that Americans are growing more and more preoccupied with their homes. Some people claim that we have gone from simply cocooning in our homes to burrowing into them, and thus shutting out the world far more successfully. No longer is our home just our castle; it has become our fortress.

Yet our home is not simply the four walls around us. There is also a home inside each of us. We may be aware of this inside home and comfortable with it, or we may neglect this home, remain absent from it, keep trying to get away from it, as though driven from our deepest selves. What about the home we already are? The condition of our inside home is at least as important as that of our outside one. We need to be as concerned about who occupies this interior residence as we are about the occupant or occupants of our outer domicile.

One reason our inside home is so important is that God desires to be our guest within us. Remember the promise Jesus makes at the Last Supper that appears in today’s Scripture? *“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”* (v. 23). The Father and the Son will come and with them, as always, the Holy Spirit will come. The Trinity wants to dwell inside each one of us. Have we made room for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or do we leave no space available for the Trinity?

The New International Version translates the title of today’s sermon with the word “Advocate.” But in the original Greek of John 14:25 the word Jesus uses is *parakletos*, or “Paraclete” as we often transliterate it. Pay attention if you type that word into a Microsoft Word document because it may keep trying to autocorrect it into “Parakeet.” Although avian imagery can be used for the Holy Spirit, that’s not exactly the bird we’re looking for here! Literally this bird (like the descending Dove at Jesus’ baptism) is the third Person of the Trinity who Jesus promised will come “alongside” of us to be our teacher.

Perhaps you’ve heard various explanations of how to understand this, such as, someone like an attorney who stands next to her client in a court of law. But in this setting the meaning feels a bit more like a *tutor* or a *prompter* off stage in the wings while a play is going on. The Paraclete stands next to us or near us so that we can be reminded of Jesus’ words and teachings as the Holy Spirit whispers those things into our hearts, prompting us to remember what we might otherwise forget. It’s a dark and difficult world, after all, filled with sorrow and uncertainty, which was true in that room on the night when Jesus

spoke these very words. The sorrow of it all can make us lose our place, forget what we know is true. How good is it then to have the Holy Spirit come alongside us to remind us of the dearest things Jesus said and taught.

Jesus repeated a saying that night: *Let not your hearts be troubled*. But it's difficult to imagine a more troubling context in which to say such a thing! Jesus kept talking about *peace*, but all hell was about to break loose on the Nazarene and his band of followers. In fact, the mayhem at hand had already begun. Judas had already left the table by the time Jesus says the words contained in this passage from John 14. What's more, Peter's impending denials of Jesus had also been foretold. The atmosphere was as taut as the head of a snare drum. It was also unspeakably sad.

I often tend to think concerning this 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John that it would not surprise me if the words Jesus spoke in the first verse had been spoken as Jesus' lips trembled and as tears began to form in the corners of his eyes. The Bible almost never tells us the manner in which a given line was spoken—unlike novels, short stories or movie scripts. The Bible does not have descriptive adverbs like “He spoke *sternly*” or “She replied *softly*.” So we're left to imagine in what tone of voice various lines were spoken.

In the case of John 14, we often assume that Jesus was speaking confidently, strongly, bravely. But what if—having just seen one disciple bail out on him to betray him and having just told another disciple he would soon deny him—what if, Jesus' tone was more sorrowful, fraught with emotion not unlike the way some of us would speak at the funeral of a loved one or friend when we struggle to keep our own voice from breaking should the emotion of the moment catch us off guard?

If we can imagine Jesus speaking these words of comfort and peace in a tone of voice that matched the acoustics of the room on that dark night in which he was betrayed, then the poignancy of it will hit home in a new way. After all, even Jesus said he did not give *peace* as the world gives, and it's a good thing, too. This world is anything but peaceful most of the time. And so what little peace it has to offer us tends to be a temporary cease fire—something provisional, usually untrustworthy, always precarious. The world cannot finally give what it does not firmly possess itself. A poor man can promise you all the money in the world, but if he has none to give you, in the end, what good is his promise? A world in love with war can promise you peace, but in the final analysis, there's seldom enough real peace to go around.

In 2009 Barack Obama came into office on the wings of peace, or at least the prospect of less war and more peace. You may remember he was even given the Nobel Peace Prize because of how great the expectation of peace was back then. Although we got out of Iraq, it's never been what you would call a stable place. Back then a brutal war started in Libya, in Syria, and then came ISIS. Afghanistan, as of last August, is now in the hands of the Taliban. And today there is the totally unjustified and immoral Russian invasion of Ukraine. It seems to me that "peaceful" is not an adjective we could use to describe the world when any U.S. President in this century has taken office.

If there is to be peace at all, it has to come from somewhere else. That's where Jesus comes in, as you might have expected me to say. But the fact that he can promise genuine, lasting peace in perhaps a broken voice, with a tear or two streaming down his face, lets us know, for sure, that the very features of this world that make most of us long for peace cannot ruin or remove from us God's peace. It is possible to embrace Jesus' peace even in the midst of turmoil and woe. And we know that to be true because the time and place and manner in which Jesus spoke about such peace in John 14 is proof positive that the terrors of this world cannot cancel the *shalom* that Jesus brings. It didn't do so then; and even now we can believe in lasting peace AND cry in sorrow at the same time.

Nor does the presence of hardship in our lives, therefore, mean that the Holy Spirit who Jesus promised would come has left us or abandoned us. The two can and do co-exist; the Holy Spirit and our hurts; Jesus' peace and life's hardships. And I suspect we all know deep down in our hearts why that fact is such good news.

As C.S. Lewis once said, we too often substitute religion for God. But that is like substituting navigation for arrival or courting for marriage. Getting to your destination is wonderful but the trip itself is also valuable. Courtship, dating, the thrill of romance you experience when you are wooing someone to marry you is thrilling, unique, exhilarating. But the journey toward a whole, wholesome, and blessed marriage continues long after the courtship ends.

The building and strengthening of a marriage continues just as much in the pots and pans and dirty laundry of everyday life as it does in the candles and roses of our early romance. That is why I find it more than a little suspect when couples describe their marriage as a never-ending string of sizzling romance, with zero fighting, and at the dinner table exchanging star-struck gazes in each other's eyes. Right!?! What are they trying to prove? Couples who talk like that are either a sign that the rest of us have really under-performing

marriages, or it's an indication that these couples are not seeing their own marriage in a totally realistic way—maybe thinking this is the only acceptable way to present a happy marriage to other couples.

As the former pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Craig Barnes, once wrote, many of us spend far too much time trying to *become* something we are not, instead of just *being* who we already are. Of course, I realize that this could quickly become an excuse not to pursue the spiritual things of God. But the goal here is not to foster complacency, but rather a greater awareness of how God in Christ is already at work within us. By becoming more aware of that we can become more intentional in following Jesus along the way that we are currently traveling with him.

As it turns out, Jesus was the very autobiography of God. He was the Son who was his Father through and through. It's just that the disciples of Jesus assumed that being with the Father would introduce them to something quite different from the road they had been walking up to that point. Jesus had a different idea. In and through everything they had seen in Jesus, the obviously divine things he had done, as well as the typical everyday things he had done, they had already seen the Father. Jesus was so completely part of his Father that, as it turns out, everything he did was transformed by the power and majesty of the Father and the Holy Spirit in him.

Jesus says in verse 27, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" His promise is that inside of us will be the *peace* that he gives, no matter what the conflict, challenge or war that is raging all around us. There is no reason for our hearts to be afraid. Jesus left us the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

The verb form of *parakletos*, *parakaleo* in Greek, appears 8 times in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. That verb means "to encourage" and is used in 1 Thessalonians more than any other book in the New Testament. I wouldn't be exaggerating to say that 1 Thessalonians was written for one purpose: To encourage Christians and to equip them to be encouragers. I believe that the Paraclete was sent by the Father and Son for many reasons, but mainly, to live in our deepest selves, to give us the encouragement that we all so desperately need. Once he takes up residence in us, everything is different, everything inside and outside of us!

Is there a home for the Paraclete in you? Amen.