

“The Next Right Thing”  
John 14:15-21  
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“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.”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Jesus is in the upper room after the last supper. This passage is all part of how Jesus is preparing the disciples to say ‘goodbye’ to the way things have been. He will be crucified. He will rise. He will go to be with the Father. He will not be with them in body the way he has been the last 3 years. The disciples wonder, “Will we be left alone?”

The early church would have heard this Gospel read aloud in their gathered assembly years after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. They have never known Jesus in the body. They

have only heard the stories. They are being persecuted severely for gathering in Jesus' name. And as they hear these words read aloud, they must have wondered, "Have we been left all alone?"

Our world has put many things on pause in the past couple months, not the least of which is gathering in-person to be the Church. As we wait for testing to improve, for a vaccine to be ready and widely available, for contact tracing to be widespread, we wait with masks on and lives on hold. And maybe some of us are wondering, "Has God left us all alone?"

These words of Jesus are a response to this question of God's people: "Will we be left alone in all this madness?" And to this, Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." We heard this promise as Pastor Dexter preached last week about Jesus' making a home with us wherever we are, abiding with us, promising to be with us. And this promise continues as we hear about the Advocate, sometimes translated "the Comforter", the Holy Spirit who Jesus promised would come into the world to be Christ's presence of truth in our midst. Because he lives, we also will live. On that day we will know that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him and Jesus is in us. We will be swept up in the love of the trinity, all together, abiding forever. We will not be left alone. We will not be left as orphans. The Spirit is coming to us.

I kept waiting to feel comforted by this knowledge as I sat with the text this week, but all I felt was the same stagnant feeling I've felt creeping into the corners of my mind since our Stay Home, Stay Healthy order was rightfully extended. I am grateful for these assurances of God's presence with us in the midst of all of this, but I don't feel any different. There's something about

being in this holding pattern, for me at least, that makes it hard to feel the presence of God. I believe those promises in my head, but my heart and my body can't seem to catch up.

And so I went back to this text. And I noticed a pair of bookends in the passage that didn't seem to fit with all the assurances that God's presence would be with us. At the beginning - "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And then a few verses later, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me..." What does keeping Christ's commandments have to do with the promise of his presence with us?

And I was taken back to a song I heard in a recent Disney movie, Frozen 2. The moment in the movie that came rushing back to me when I returned to this passage was when Princess Anna has been separated from all her friends and she is lost in a cave with no idea how to get herself out. Like any good Disney princess, this moment of sadness leads her into a song. The movie came out months ago, but somehow I think it's the song we needed for this pandemic. Listen to the words Anna sings...

"Can there be a day beyond this night?

I don't know anymore what is true

I can't find my direction, I'm all alone

The only star that guided me was you

How to rise from the floor

When it's not you I'm rising for?

Just do the next right thing

Take a step, step again

It is all that I can to do

The next right thing

I won't look too far ahead  
It's too much for me to take  
But break it down to this next breath  
This next step  
This next choice is one that I can make  
So I'll walk through this night  
Stumbling blindly toward the light  
And do the next right thing  
And with the dawn, what comes then?  
When it's clear that everything will never be the same again  
Then I'll make the choice  
To hear that voice  
And do the next right thing”<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus tells his disciples, tells the early church living through persecution, tells us all these centuries later to keep his commandments, I think he might be telling us to do the next right thing. Just before dinner, remember, Jesus had given his disciples a command to wash one another's feet, and then he proceeded to do this for them, an embodied summary of all the commands he had given them in the past 3 years of ministry. And this serving love would take him to the cross to give his life away, an outpouring of grace that would change the world forever. This wasteful giving, this outpouring of grace, this service that kneels to wash the dirt off of someone's feet, this is somehow always the next right thing. It's about serving the person before us, absolutely. But in this season, it has me wondering if Jesus knew we would need this call to movement to help us experience his presence when we too are lost in the caves of confusion and

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<sup>1</sup> “The Next Right Thing”, Kristen Bell lyrics,  
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/kristenbell/thenextrightthing.html>

despair. Perhaps there is something about deciding to kneel at the dirty feet of those in our lives right now to wash them in love that allows our bodies to feel that, in all this mess, God really is with us. I was reminded this week that the Greek word for the Advocate here is *paraclete*, and that noun literally means, “One who comes alongside”, and that’s when it came together for me. When we respond with grace instead of criticism to the frustrating habit of that person we shelter in place with, there is the One who comes alongside. When we pause in reaching for whatever has been helping to numb the existential pain right now and instead reach for the phone to call that person we know is struggling, there is the One who comes alongside. When we choose generosity instead of hoarding in this season where everything feels scarce, there is the One who comes alongside. “In a little while the world will no longer see me,” Jesus says, “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.” We will see Jesus, we will find he is living in us, we will know that we have been swept up into the life of God because in doing what Jesus commanded us to do, the next right thing, the Spirit has the opportunity to come alongside us.

There’s no map for the next weeks, months, even years, dear friends. But ours is not to imagine the destination. Ours is to keep Christ’s commandment one step at a time to love with the same wasteful generosity that he did. So at each juncture this week, when we feel lost in the darkness of this cave, do the next right thing. And somehow, the One who comes alongside will be there, bringing about the dawn we cannot see now, and making good on God’s promise to be with us forever. Amen.