***“Another Advocate”*** by S. Finlan, for The First Church, May 17, 2020

**1 Peter 3:13–16**

13Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; 16yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear.

**John 14:15–21**

15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. 17This 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.

18“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They 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.”

Jesus promises to send the Spirit of Truth, an Advocate for believers. Here he puts the emphasis on the Spirit as a bringer of spiritual intimacy with him and his Father, saying that he and his Father will come to the believers and love them. The Spirit will draw people closer to Jesus and to the Father. And it will increase the believer’s understanding of them. We will come to know that Jesus is *in* the Father, and in us, too. There is a deep intermingling, a sharing of spiritual purpose, between Jesus, the Father, and the believer.

The Spirit can help us develop a practice of spiritual understanding. We can then try to use the Spirit as the standard of judgment by which we measure ourselves. We can learn to seek only God’s approval. We can cease to care so much what people say and think; they are not our standard of judgment any more. As the 1 Peter reading says “do not fear what they fear” (3:14). We no longer hold ourselves up before the tribunal of human judgment, but only before the divine judgment. That does not mean that we have made ourselves aloof from humanity, for we are ready to provide a response to any who ask us to describe the hope that is within us. But we can do it with gentleness, and not arrogance, Peter says. We are holding ourselves to a higher standard, a higher court of judgment than most people do, but that does not mean we are inherently better than others. We are all on the learning path in the school of love.

So there’s the personal faith side, and then the functioning in front of human beings side. The gospel passage focuses on the personal faith experience, the closeness to the Father and the Son that the Spirit brings. The First Peter passage tells us how that plays out in our relations with people, who are not always fair. Thus, they might make us “suffer for doing what is right” (3:13). They might try to make us fear or admire the things that *they* fear or admire. These would be materialistic standards, and I think that is what Jesus means when he says the world cannot receive the Spirit because it does not know God. Completely worldly, material thinking is simply blind, deaf, and dumb when it comes to the Spirit.

But those who accept the Father and the Son, and so receive the Spirit, become partners with God. We are not mindless automatons who are directed by God. Rather, we are like partners who accept the Godly influence in our lives, and cooperate with God in everything we do. We are kayaking down the stream of life with God in the other seat of the kayak. Usually God is the pilot, but sometimes God lets us pick a destination. If we want to pull over to the shore and see if there are any frogs there, God is willing. God values our creativity and interest.

It is Jesus for whom I have the strongest feeling. The same may be true for you. It may be Jesus who is your partner in the kayak. If Jesus is your partner, he’s like a friendly older brother. You have adventures together. You can trust that brother. He stays with you whether the stream is burbling along, or gets stormy and difficult. We can always feel his presence near us. The fatherly-brotherly presence of Jesus, through the Spirit, is a central part of our experience. If we feel the love of Jesus, then we become peaceful.

Jesus and the Father have given us another Advocate, the Spirit of Truth. If the Spirit abides within you, you know that you are not alone. Jesus said he will not leave us orphaned, but he and the Father, through the Spirit, will come into our hearts and reveal themselves to us. I think this is referring to a spiritual comfort and to a kind of teaching that does not occur on the conscious level. We are being taught and led in a manner that occurs independently of our conscious minds. That is the way God speaks to our heart. I don’t hear God or Jesus speaking in English to me—usually—but I am convinced they are speaking to my soul, that I am learning on an unconscious level. Sometimes I learn a lesson quickly. Other times, it may take years to learn a lesson. But when the lesson becomes a part of me, then I have taken an important step on the Godward path.

As you live this life of seeking ever closer partnership with God, the power of the Spirit will manifest in your life. You become a more dignified and powerful person. Love comes more naturally and easily. You find it more easy to admit when you are wrong. Your heart burns within you as you think of Jesus’ words. You find creative ways to speak about God and about spiritual living. And evangelism tends to happen very naturally and without any fanfare, as a natural product of your fruit-bearing life.

Now what is meant by the Spirit as Advocate? It refers to the Spirit as a kind of defender on the spiritual level, encouraging us and helping us go through hard times as well as good ones. The Spirit may not rescue us from any hard times, but will accompany us through them. Of course, the Spirit advocates for the spiritual viewpoint, which also means advocating for us, because the spiritual way is what is truly good for us. The word translated “Advocate” can also be rendered “Comforter,” as the King James Version does. That is beautiful: God has sent a comforter. The Spirit is our instructor, our re-shaper, our Advocate and Comforter.

We hold ourselves to a high standard, and we lean on the Comforter for help in living up to the standard. We are comforted by our partnership with Jesus, and we trust that God is teaching us in the depths of our hearts.

My suggestion to you this morning is to live trustingly. Trust Jesus and the Spirit to work with you, and *within* you. You are not an orphan in the universe. You have a loving partner who abides with you, who whispers to your soul, and helps you navigate the stream of life.