

Sunday May 25th, 2025

Easter IV

John 14:23-29

“Call My Lawyer”

At the Baptist church the squirrels had taken an interest in the baptistery. The deacons met and decided to put a waterslide on the baptistery and let the squirrels drown themselves. The squirrels liked the slide and unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim, so twice as many squirrels showed up the following week.

The Lutheran church decided that they were not able to harm any of God’s creatures. So, they humanely trapped their squirrels and set them free near the Baptist church. Two weeks later the squirrels were back when the Baptists took down the water-slide.

The Episcopalians tried a much more unique path by setting out pans of whiskey around their church to kill the squirrels with alcohol poisoning. They sadly learned how much damage a band of drunk squirrels can do. But the Catholic church came up with a very creative strategy! They baptized all the squirrels and made them members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

And not much was heard from the Jewish synagogue. They took the first squirrel and circumcised him. Sometimes we encounter people that we frankly wish would go away. We might even try as the Baptists did in the story of the squirrels to encourage said unwanted people to go away. All of us have been involved with goodbyes where a tear is shed. Secretly we say, “Don’t leave angry. Just leave.”

On the other hand, there are a different kind of goodbyes. How many of you have been part of sad goodbyes? Perhaps it was because of an adult child leaving home. Perhaps it was because a visitor was leaving, or perhaps it was because you were getting ready to leave after visiting someone. Perhaps it was because of the death of a family member or friend. Regardless of the situation, sometimes goodbyes are not easy.

The reading from John 14:23-29 was part of Jesus’s goodbye message to his disciples. This took place at the Last Supper. Jesus told his disciples that he will be crucified. Naturally, the disciples were sad. They had spent the last three years learning from him. Even though they struggled to comprehend the full impact of what Jesus was saying, I think on some level they got the point. They wondered how they would cope after he was gone.

The final night’s conversation between Jesus and his disciples continues. Jesus has made clear that he is about to leave them. They are struggling with that news emotionally and conceptually. Jesus has just said that he will not leave them alone (“orphaned,” verse 18). He will continue to love them. He will continue to reveal himself to them but not to the world. Judas (not Iscariot) then asks how that can be (verse 22). How will Jesus reveal himself to these few?

Perhaps Judas had in mind the standard apocalyptic event, like lightning flashing from east to west, a revelation that is unavoidable for all (Matthew 24:27). But Jesus is talking about a different kind of self-revelation.

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The answer to Judas's question is love. That is how Jesus reveals himself, and that will continue. Loving someone shapes behavior. That is true with parents and children, spouses and partners. Loving our neighbors means actions oriented toward them and their good. It is the same in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Their love for him will shape their lives so that they keep his word (verse 23).

That surely means the specific command on this final night that they serve one another (13:31–35, last Sunday's text). It also means keeping at the heart of their life together his word about the Father's love, about grace and truth, and about him going to the Father. Those claims will give shape to their lives of discipleship. Keeping Jesus' word will also mean being honest about the ways that their love for Jesus still falls short, as verse 28 implies.

The Father will love them (verse 23). This is a promise, and we should be careful not to make this love conditional. The Father's love does not wait for the disciples to love first. After all, "God so loved the world"; 3:16). God refuses to love from a distance. That is part of what the Incarnation means. So, both the Father and the Son will come to make a new home with Jesus' disciples.

The word translated "home" in verse 23 is used only one other time in the New Testament. In John 14:2, Jesus assured the disciples that his Father's house has many "dwelling places" and that Jesus goes to the Father to prepare a place for them. Now in verse 23, that language is turned inside out. The Father and the Son will make their "dwelling place" with the disciples. This noun is related to the far more frequently used verb in John, "remain" or "abide." Disciples are those who "abide" in Jesus, in his love, and in his word.

Discipleship is more than effort exerted toward certain behaviors. It is relationship. It is life with another. The Father and the son will make their "abiding place" with the disciples. The first disciples asked where Jesus was staying (1:38); now they have their answer: Jesus is staying **with them**. Jesus is certainly going away, yet paradoxically, the life of the church is not marked by Jesus' absence but by the presence of an abiding God.

When someone we love leaves us, it's natural for us to not want to see them go, but if we **really** love them, we **must** let them go. Real love allows us to release those we care about. When we try to hang on to the ones we love, we are being selfish. Jesus was preparing to die and eventually return to his Father, but the disciples did not want him to leave. He urged them to rejoice because he was leaving. His departure would allow the disciples and all believers to do great things, including growing the Christian community.

In this moment, Jesus was more concerned for the disciples than he was for himself. He reassured them that they would not be alone. He promised them peace and hope—the same peace and hope he offers to all believers. Even though he offered instructions to the disciples during his earthly ministry, he knew that they did not understand what he had taught them. They did remember his words and teachings after the resurrection and ascension.

When Jesus was with his disciples, they could listen to his teachings and ask him questions.

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When he was gone, the Holy Spirit assumed that role. For the rest of their lives and as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the Gospels, the Spirit reminded them of all the things Jesus did and spoke. The Holy Spirit stood with them and guided them, just like the Holy Spirit stands with us and guides us today. Jesus made it clear that followers love him by serving others. That message is just as relevant to us today. To live that kind of love requires the constant presence of God in our lives.

There are times when we feel alone, and we don't know what will happen to us. We could be stranded in a strange town with a broken-down car. Our spouse has just died, and our future looks bleak. You've lost your job, and you have no idea what to do next. At times like these it's natural for us to ask ourselves, "What's to become of me?" How do we take care of ourselves in such moments? For us as Christians, the answer is clear. God wants us to trust in him. When we do, we will receive both the Holy Spirit and God's peace.

When Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving, they were afraid. They could not imagine their future without him. Jesus confronted their fears with four truths, and these truths allow all believers to overcome fear:

1. We may be inadequate, but the Holy Spirit will make us competent and courageous. He will teach us and remind us of what Jesus has already taught us.
2. We may be fearful, but the peace of Jesus Christ is ours for the taking. Jesus wants us to focus our attention on the final victory.
3. Circumstances may be difficult, but victory has been assured. Jesus has written the future, and it can't be changed. Our future might be difficult, and our experiences might not always be pleasant, but we can endure with hope because God has secured victory for us.
4. Circumstances may be difficult, but courage is found in obedience. We do not have to fear anything. God is our ally, especially when we face enemies. When we trust him, we begin a process of growth in which we experience the truth of Christ's words personally through obedience. When we obey God, our fears diminish.

The peace Jesus offers is not the same peace that the world offers. The peace offered by the world is like the peace that people enjoyed during Christ's lifetime. That peace was the Roman peace—a peace that was founded by military might, funded by Roman taxation and enforced by soldiers. It was dominance rather than peace. In contrast, Christ offers real peace. We can see that peace in the lives of ourselves and fellow believers. We will receive a calm strength. We can use Romans 8:31 as our motto—“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

The world situation today is scary.

There are wars, disease, hunger, famine, terrorism and other problems. If we think that we live in a country that is free from trouble, we are wrong. There was a story in the news last week about the execution by terrorists of a Canadian citizen who was held captive in the Philippines. Closer to home, recently there were three shootings in Halifax that were possibly related.

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As Christians, we need to be concerned for our world and pray for it, but we do not need to be afraid because we have the Holy Spirit within us, and it offers us the peace of Christ.

Yet, besides the terrors of this world perhaps even more frightening is that our world is in a constant state of boredom. Tony Campolo writes about how many people are living with the Peggy Lee syndrome. For those of you of a certain vintage will remember the singer Peggy Lee and maybe you remember she had a song call “Is That All There Is?” Many people feel like that song. They feel life should be more fulfilling, and they are disappointed.

Lord Chesterton once writes, “There comes a time in the late afternoon, when the children tire of their games. It is then that they turn to torturing the cat.” We live in a world where so many people tire of the games they play. And the boredom and emptiness they turn to destructive behaviour. I agree with Tony Campolo that much of the ills that plague our world are caused by this malaise and the cure comes from an infusion of the Holy Spirit into people’s lives.

Christ’s peace is the kind of peace we feel inside even when the world around us is falling apart. Christ’s peace is peace of mind, peace in our conscience, peace with our fellow believers, peace with our bosses and coworkers, peace with our environment and peace with our world. Jesus gives us this peace freely, without expecting anything in return **except** for the hope that when we are changed by this peace, we might pass it on to others.

Jesus tells his disciples and us not to be troubled. Trusting him does not mean that all of life’s circumstances will change for the better, but that his followers will have peace as they endure trials and difficulties. When we receive the peace of Christ, we can take our problems to the cross. Christ’s peace gives us peace in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit will give us God’s wisdom, counsel, knowledge and power. It will make us more dependent on God and less dependent on worldly things. Jesus wants us to focus on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are sovereign over us, our circumstances, our possessions and other people. When we allow God to be sovereign over all these things, everything finds the right balance. We see ourselves as we should, circumstances become God’s tools, possessions become blessings and people become our equals before Christ.

They become equally unworthy of grace and love. When we are confronted by fear, we can turn our attention to God within us and ask God to take control of us and our situations.

The Holy Spirit keeps our relationship with God vibrant. It holds us together in love with Jesus and with God. The Holy Spirit allows us to see God at work and learn about him. It allows us to communicate with him and learn from him, especially when we read the Bible. Love for Christ is demonstrated by keeping his commandments. Obedience flowing from love is very different from obedience performed out of obligation.

Jesus promises his presence as people join him in his work. God is always with us, because the Father and the Son have made their home with us where we are. God has made his home in our hearts, and in return he has made a home for us in heaven. Home is where we are with the Lord-and we are with the Lord now-and will be with the Lord forever.