

[Jesus said] “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.” (John 14:15–21, NRSV)

Grace and peace to you from God our father and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Here we are coming to the final words Jesus shares with his disciples in the upper room in the gospel of John and he emphasizes how he's not going to leave them orphaned. He begins it by saying if you love me you will keep my commandments. Now as Lutherans, of course, we might wrestle with this a bit, but we are to remember that it's not in the legalistic sense that Jesus is talking about keeping commandments. The life of a Christian is daily repentance - it's one of the things we as Lutherans remember. It was one of the big things that Luther taught. Keeping his commandments - a part of that is just remembering to repent and believe in the good news. The good news is, we have a God who loves us and is eager to forgive us when we come to him with repentance. So he also says that he's going to the Father and, “I will ask the father and He will give you another advocate. That's an **important** thing. “Another advocate.” In other words, the Holy Spirit - yes he's the comforter, that helper, the advocate. Those are all legitimate translations for that wonderful Greek word, “Paraclete;” It's one who stands alongside. An advocate also is one who defends, like a defense attorney. And as we remember sometimes when we say the prayers of the church (especially in the longer Thanksgiving at Holy Communion) we recall - we call to mind Jesus when we say “the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest” so he is telling the disciples and us that that he is going to send “another advocate” and the advocate does all that.

In addition to all that, we believe, that it is by the Holy Spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit that, indeed, we have the scriptures, the holy Bible. the author (there were many human authors) but one holy author, God the Holy Spirit, is the one who inspires all the words. 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...” When does that happen, you might ask? Well, when we were baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” we received the spirit of God and it is with that Spirit - empowered by that Spirit, that we get to hear a couple sermons today. I'll focus mostly on the one that Paul preaches at Areopogus which is otherwise known as Mars Hill Areopogus (quick history lesson) Aries was the Greek God of War and so Areopagus is the mountain of Aries uh in in Latin in the Roman world that's otherwise known as Mars Hill. Mars is the Roman God of War (just for a quick history lesson). So Paul addresses the Athenians and talks to them about because they were

pantheists they believed in many gods as did the Romans they all believe they believed in so many different gods for each and every part of creation. There was a God for (as I've already indicated) the God of War known as Aries by the Greeks and Mars by the by the Romans and so Paul does something very shrewd here and it's a very good way it's kind of the first lesson in Christian apologetics. He's outlining how he's not coming down on them saying, "you pagans - you heathens, you worship all these gods..." No, he is not being legalistic at all. Empowered by the Spirit, Paul is doing his best to persuade them that this one statue they have that they have dedicated "to the unknown God," (the God unknown to them) is THE GOD of all. Our God and Father who sent his son Jesus. Paul starts, in a very interesting way, to say to these Athenians, well, I'm going to tell you about this God whom you don't know. I know him and I want you to know him. And so, this is how he lays it out. And it's really a wonderful sermon – "what therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything. Since He himself gives to all mortals life, and breath, and all things, one of the chief things even the Jews would do this - you could give up offerings to God, sin offerings. We know a lot about how lambs were sacrificed, especially as part of the Passover meal. It was not uncommon for offerings to be given to God, the creator of heaven and earth; God, our father by the faithful Jewish folks back then. But also, the pantheists - those who worshiped all kinds of different gods, had all kinds of different offerings for all their gods. They would pray to the idols that they created as if those were very gods. Now, there's a difference between religious art (and for the Greek Orthodox even iconography) some might be confused about that, as if they were considered objects of worship. This crucifix, for instance, these items – well, many could confuse them for idols – no, they remind us of who God is. Greek Orthodox icons, too, are called windows into heaven. We see them as what they are. They are things that remind us of God. Much like God's word, the holy scriptures, remind us of who God is in words, religious art like a cross, a crucifix or like icons for the Greek Orthodox, stained glass in our beautiful sanctuaries - both at Saint John and Trinity; wonderful images that remind us of who God is and remind us of special moments in the life of Christ. Whether praying at the garden of Gethsemane as we see in trinity's beautiful window or many other depictions of Christ, we're reminded of who God is and of God's great love for us.

So Paul, as he explains to these Greeks of who God is, he's warning them against Pagan worship of images - of idols. Then he goes on to say "God has overlooked the times of human ignorance. Now he commands all people, everywhere, to repent because he has fixed a day on which He will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed and of this He has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, ALLELUIA!

It is remarkable as we consider that Paul (who was Saul) we just heard about Saul of tarsus who stood by at the stoning of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr. But a week or so ago that

was our first lesson from Acts. We hear now that, after his conversion on the road to Damascus as Ananias (one of Christ's disciples) was sent by Christ to go lay his hands on Saul once he was struck blind on the road to Damascus, Ananias was understandably reluctant. "How can we trust him? He wanted to kill us." But Jesus said to Ananias not to worry and that Jesus had handpicked Saul to become Paul and to proclaim his name - proclaim Jesus to the gentiles and Jesus told Ananias, "I will also teach Paul how much he must suffer because of my name." So, now emboldened by that experience that blinded him on the road to Damascus, Paul is now proclaiming Christ in creative ways among the pantheists - among the pagans of Greece at the Areopagus (a.k.a. "Mars Hill") with this wonderful sermon. Some might even debate about it but I think it was a good explication to people who had no idea of who the God of Israel was or anything about that same God sending a savior sending a Messiah sending a Christ but Paul as the resurrection faith the faith of Christ being risen - risen indeed, alleluia! As that faith was growing, and as we hear in the acts of the apostles we see it all coming to fruition as Paul preaches boldly about this Jesus whom he considered an enemy of the people of Israel who now he sees as the savior of Israel and all the world. The one God sent to proclaim forgiveness and repentance and forgiveness of sins. So now, returning to our gospel lesson, we hear these wonderful promises from Jesus to his disciples about how He is not leaving them orphaned. He's going to the father but He's also coming to us coming to you. "I'm going but I'm coming," Jesus says. How is this possible? the Holy Spirit, the one who brings Christ's presence to them, and us - whenever two or more of us are gathered in Christ's name He is here among us. How does this happen? The Holy Spirit makes the presence of Christ possible to each and everyone of us - individually but also as a community in Christ. And that same Spirit gives us the words that embolden our faith, that inspire us, that help us along the way. Because the way can be difficult. Just as I was speaking last week, so it is true this week. Just as we heard in the gospel lesson last week that Jesus is the way the truth and the life we are people of that way we are people who humbly serve others in Christ's name and we celebrate that fact and the love of course that he talks to us about. I've talked about this before in my sermons and I remember hearing about it in seminary from my Hebrew professor that he encouraged folks not to think about love in the sentimental, gushy, mushy way we think about it when we hear love songs on the radio (and that kind of thing) But more about a **fierce** kind of a love - a fierce loyalty. As Rich Mullins says in one of my favorite songs of his: "there's a loyalty that's deeper than mere sentiment," and that's that kind of love - that kind of loyalty that Jesus is talking about. "Those who love me will be loved by my father and I will love them and reveal myself to them... and in this is love that God sent his only son that whosoever should believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life God loved us so much that while we were yet sinners he sent his son Jesus Christ to die for the ungodly, (as Paul would later say). And so, as we remember these bedrocks of our faith, I know it's been a long time, and it was not intentional but we indeed will be saying the Apostles Creed together especially as Jesus talks about how the Father will send another advocate the Holy Spirit. We are coming to this. In the church year, while we celebrate Easter

every Sunday we're saying goodbye for this time of the year to the Easter season but we also always celebrate that he is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia! As we look forward to Christ's Ascension - this upcoming Thursday is Ascension Day, we also next Sunday will be preparing for the following Sunday - Pentecost Sunday when we will finally start gathering for worship again in safety. In Jesus name. Amen!