

Hello everyone! This is Pastor Melinda from Shiloh UCC. Tancrede and Sophia will be helping me with the Sunday service. Let's start with a Prelude!

Prelude: Mozart - The Piano Sonata No 16 in C major (Andante)

John 14:15-21 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

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

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

"Jesus Loves You"

One of Sophia's favorite hymns is: "Jesus Loves Me." Tank and I have been singing it to her since she was born. Many times when she was a little baby, I put her to sleep by calmly singing "Jesus Loves Me." She loved it. Even if she was a little cranky or maybe had some tummy pain, she would eventually calm down and go to sleep. :)

Why am I mentioning this? First of all, we will attempt to sing "Jesus Loves Me" later during the service, maybe with Sophia's help, if she cooperates.

But seriously, in today's reading we hear a lot about love. The love we hear today is not romantic love like in the Song of Songs. It is also not simply friendship, but full Agape-love, real love, the way Christ loves us. In reality, the whole text is focused on God's transformative love.

Jesus gives us instruction on how to experience Agape love. He tells us if we follow this instruction sacred love will change everything. What kind of "commandments" does Jesus give anyway?

Earlier in the gospel, in chapter 13 Jesus tells His disciples: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (And the next verse) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

The Agape love we share doesn't come from our personal conditioning. It comes from God. Before we even entered the womb, God loved us first, and made us in God's image. We were beautifully made, a wonder to behold, but sin separated us from God's love and we forgot our true nature. We fell from the glory of God, and Jesus is showing us the way back home.

But before we go deeper into the meaning of this text, it's important to mention that these are some of Jesus' last words to his disciples. New Testament Scholars call John chapters 14 to 16 the Farewell Discourse. The Farewell Discourse focuses on the imminent arrival of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus knows what's ahead, and that the coming days will be a hard trial of faith for his disciples. Chapter 14 starts out with these comforting words: (Jesus says) "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

Before Jesus asks us to do anything, he comforts us. Before we are asked to wake up, God loves us and comforts us. In the beginning God loved us. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that Jesus "commands" his disciples to love also.

In the end of the farewell discourse, Jesus talks about the most important force in the Universe; Agape-love. He says; "If you love me..., you will love God and each other. When you do this, I will send you someone, who will help you. Jesus calls this someone the "Advocate" and the "Spirit of Truth."

The Greek word for "Advocate" is Παράκλητον in our text, which can be translated in many different ways. It can mean comforter, helper, or counselor. The two roots that create the word mean "one called to your side" but not someone who defends you like a lawyer. The Paraclete doesn't speak to the judge. Instead, the "comforter" speaks with the person on trial, encouraging, and helping them.

Jesus promises us that His Spirit will help us put one foot in front of the other, even when life gets tough. Right now, we all need the "Comforter" to speak to our hearts. We all need the "Comforter" to cheer us up when we are down or depressed. When we see the News on TV about the virus it can cause a sadness, a grief. This virus has changed daily life, and because of it we need God's Holy Spirit to stand by us, and assure us even more. We need to know that God still loves us.

I don't doubt that God loves me. I see God's goodness everywhere, even in these times some call the end days. There is beauty everywhere. We just have to open our eyes and look. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God loves me. But do you know that God loves you?

Jesus doesn't just love ministers. Jesus doesn't just love cute little girls named "Sophie". God doesn't love just movie stars and billionaires. God loves us all. God loves us when we are young, and God might even love us a little more when we are old. Young or young at heart, God loves us all. Pretty or plain, God loves us all. And if God loves us all, let's be clear, that must mean, that God loves you too. (smile)

God's Spirit reminds us that we are cared for and cherished. The Holy Spirit brings a level of truth that is higher than our current ethical development as humans. Humanly we may be upset about the injustice in our world. But we lack the enthusiasm and motivation to do anything about it.

The Spirit of Truth is that Sacred One called to your side who gives you the strength to fight the good fight. It is what inspired Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and Mother Theresa. It can be what inspires you, too. It can be the comfort and assurance that calls all of us to stand up against discrimination, poverty, and the senseless devastation of our environment. The Spirit of Truth is an advocate that inspires all of us to work for justice and peace.

The Spirit loves us, and inspires us to keep fighting. That same Holy Spirit gives us a hug when we are struggling during this epidemic. When we feel alone, the Spirit of Christ is right there with us. How do we know this? The Holy Spirit whispers in our ears, and God's angels comfort us.

As Jesus says in our Gospel: "I will not leave you orphaned." In other words, "my Spirit will abide with you. No matter what you are going through, you are not alone. My counsel, comfort and truth will be with you." No matter what we are going through these days, Covid-19 scare, illnesses, grief, or even financial problems, ...no matter what, Jesus is with us, comforting us through his Holy Spirit.

In a few weeks we will be celebrating Pentecost, when the Spirit descended on the followers of Christ. Today's text is a small prelude before the joy and enthusiasm of Pentecost fills our hearts. Before we wear our nice red clothes and e-mail our pictures to Maira, so we can all see each other, it's good to know that the Holy Spirit is with us every day. The Holy Spirit is already here, before Pentecost, guiding us, comforting us, helping us on our way.

For me, the best thing about the Holy Spirit is that it constantly reminds us of God's everlasting love for us. The agape-love that we are commanded to share with others, comes from God. That same love keeps us praying for each other during this awful epidemic. That love, like an invisible net, keeps us connected as Shiloh UCC, while our spiritual home is closed. We are still Shiloh UCC, even with the doors closed. We are still Shiloh UCC, because our hearts are always open.

So, it's good to sing hymns that we remember, hymns that we may have learned as children. These hymns remind us of not only our church building, where we usually sing them, but also God's presence that is with us while we are social distancing. Sophia is just learning these hymns, but they are important vehicles for God's Spirit to touch our hearts.

Every hymn sung is a prayer. I take the words seriously.... I know that "Jesus loves me" and I know that Jesus loves you, too. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Loving and generous God thank you for sending us the Comforter and Advocate who encourages us on our journey. Sometimes, we forget who You are. We forget that you love the world with an everlasting love, and you sent Jesus to save us.

Sometimes, we also forget who we are; your beloved and holy children, the light and heart of this world. We have a big heart, because we learn to love from you. With your agape-love, we have a heart big enough to love all your children.

Today, especially we pray for your children that are lonely, depressed and grieving. Send your “Comforter” to them so that they may feel your love and care. Send your “Comforter” to all people who are struggling physically, mentally, or financially. Comfort everyone who has been affected by the Coronavirus.

Now we pray for our families, our church family, Shiloh UCC, and our world. Heal us, cheer us up, and Comfort us. We pray all this in the name of our Resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord’s Prayer

Hymn #327 “Jesus Loves Me”

Words: <https://hymnary.org/hymn/NCH1995/327>

Benediction: And now may the Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. Amen.

Thank you for watching! Happy Sunday everyone!