

2023 05 14 – Parent, Advocate, Helper

Scripture: Luke 14:15-21 (The Inclusive Bible)

Today I want to begin by sharing a story that I read on the Internet this week. It was written by a Lutheran pastor named Rev. Dr. Janet Hunt. It begins:

I took my car in to get the oil changed a couple of days ago. Things were a little slow at 8 a.m. on a Friday morning and Alex, the man who checked me in, was full of stories which he was eager to share. It was clear that this one, in particular, is one he is proud of and it took neither prodding nor invitation to get him to tell it to the handful of us waiting for our cars to be serviced.

It seems Alex grew up in a small town in southern Wisconsin some years ago now. His parents' best friends had a six year old who was being bullied. Every day, as he was walking to school, a group of older kids would ambush him and steal his lunch money. Desperate to keep him safe, his parents talked to their best friends who roped their son, who was a few years older and a whole lot bigger, into walking him to school. Indeed, Alex, the man who now manages the place where I get my oil changed, was that little boy's protector.

It turns out that when that little boy grew up, he ran for Vice-President. Alex went to one of his campaign rallies a few years ago and managed to get close enough to speak to him, calling him by a childhood nickname. But the candidate pulled his old protector close and said, "It's Paul. My

name is Paul."

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Rev. Hunt went on to say,

What interests me about this story is not so much that a little boy needed protection on his way to school. We all have times and places when this is so. No, what captured my attention was his strong desire to leave any reminder of that hard time far behind him. No doubt, Alex's very appearance at his campaign rally brought to mind the unwelcome memory of a time when he was vulnerable --- and ironically, at a moment in time in his life when Paul felt he could show no weakness.

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What Rev. Hunt pointed out is so true, isn't it? None of us enjoy the feeling of vulnerability, and yet, there are times, throughout our lives when we need the help of others. Obviously, as children we need the protection of adults: our parents, our teachers, our guardians, our coaches and others. On this Mother's Day, or Christian Family Sunday, it is important to remember the key role of parent figures in our lives. In this story, Paul's parents knew they couldn't be there for their son during the school day, so they sought the help of friends with an older, bigger child.

But even as adults, there are times in our lives when we are vulnerable, when we could use the help of an advocate, a comforter, a friend or helper. No matter how physically strong, or rich or successful, or famous we may become, there will be

times when “going it alone” is just not an option. There will be times when the loss of a loved one, the loss of physical or mental health, or even the loss of a job will leave us feeling abandoned or orphaned. There will be times when we may feel overwhelmed or bullied by the people or challenges in our lives and we will need the advocacy of a good friend or counsellor.

Jesus’s disciples were about to enter just such a time in their lives. They were about to lose their leader, their Rabbi, their teacher. Jesus had just told them that he was going somewhere where they could not follow and they were afraid. In order to reassure them, Jesus said,

If you love me and obey the command I give you,
I will ask the One who sent me
To give you another Paraclete, another Helper
To be with you always—the Spirit of Truth

Paraclete comes from the Greek word Parakletos which means “someone who is called to come alongside someone else.” In various versions of the Bible it is translated as advocate or counsellor, comforter or helper. Jesus was promising his disciples that they would not be orphaned, that they would not be alone. He was telling them that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth would be their helper and would be with them always.

Of course the commandment that Jesus was referring to was the commandment he had given to them just a few moments earlier when he said, “Love one another. And you’re to love another the way I have loved you” (John 13:34). Jesus

was assuring them that as long as they loved and care for each other, they would also be able to recognize the presence of the Spirit of Love in their lives. They would know the comfort of being guided and protected by their God, by the One who had sent Jesus to be in their midst.

Jesus' promise to his disciples is also God's promise to us. As we say in our Creed, "We are not alone." The Spirit of Truth, the Loving Spirit of God is with us, wherever we are, whatever is happening in our lives. Sometimes we can sense the presence of the Spirit with us and other times the Spirit appears through others. For six-year old Paul, it was the older Alex who came into his life at just the right moment to keep him safe.

I remember a time in my life when my friend Kate, recognising that I was going through a hard time, invited me to plant some seeds in her garden and walked along beside me as I watched those seeds grow and discovered again the promise of new life. I invite you now to remember a time when someone has walked alongside you as your parent, your advocate, or your helper.

Even as we have felt the presence of the Spirit in our lives, we are also called to be that loving presence for others. Some of us know what it is to be a parent and to protect and guide our own children. Others of us have had the privilege of being an aunt, uncle, godparent, coach or mentor to a younger person. Nearly all of us have had the experience of supporting a friend or even a stranger in a time of need. Like Alex, we are all called to be an advocate for others, to allow the Spirit of Love to flow through us. May it be so. Amen.