

Theologian Craig Koester says, “In this (scriptural) passage, we have heard today how Jesus anticipates the Easter moment when he says, “ I will not leave your orphaned; I am coming to you” and “because I live, you also will (14: 18-19).

The Easter message, that Jesus gives to us, is that life rather than death has the final word, and this is crucial for faith. In John’s Gospel, faith is a relationship with a living being. For there to be authentic faith in Jesus, people must be able to relate to the living-Jesus—a Jesus who is present, not absent and missing or dead. Otherwise, faith is reduced to the memory or a story of a Jesus who died long ago.”

That, also, means, that an authentic faith is not built upon someone we have simply read about in a book, such as in your childhood heroes.

My childhood heroes were Amelia Earhart and Nellie Bly. They inspired me and opened my imagination to the dreams of doing something meaningful and great that benefited people. But, I only have them through stories. I have never experienced them and related with them in real life; their inspiration is distant, not up-close and personal. We all

have our personal heroes, and on this day, we will probably be quick to name our mothers as one of our heroes, and I lament for those whose mothers did not live up to this Hallmark kind of day, the nurturing kind, the selfless kind, the loving kind. I also share a grief with all who never knew their mothers. Mine died when I was a baby, and so she is in my category or Amelia Earhart and Nellie Bly, someone I know threw stories.

Though we read about Jesus through this book called the Bible, as I did the stories of Amelia and Nellie, Jesus is different. While he is considered widely as an historical figure, we know Jesus in an up-close and personal way. While this relationship we have with Jesus is a mystery, it is not esoteric or elusive, because Jesus made a promise to send an advocate in his place.

This Gospel passage speaks to a very real human reality of the fear of losing loved ones, the ones who have played an essential role in our lives; or to losing all that we know and depend upon and guides our steps, that defines our parameters and provides a direction.

Jesus is saying his farewells, and they are afraid. It is hard to be generous, brave, and compassionate when we are afraid.

Jesus is telling them, once again, “do not fear.” I have not intentions of leaving you orphaned.

“Orphaned.” You are orphaned when your parents die. That is how we often think of this word. But, we can also be orphaned when we are abandoned by those we trusted, though they still live. So orphaned can also be abandoned or neglected. We are orphaned when the things we built our life around, whether it be people, institutions, or rules are no longer there.

Jesus tells them, I will not leave your orphaned, I will send an advocate in my place.

What is it that the disciples needed to hear from Jesus about the function of the Holy Spirit in this moment? What do we need to hear about the purpose of the Holy Spirit?

And, so he tells them in so many words, that coming to faith is somewhat comparable, in a way, to falling in love. We don't fall in love

with an abstract person. True love comes through an encounter with another person. The same is true of faith. If faith is a relationship with the living Christ and the living God who sent him, then faith can only come through an encounter with them. And the Spirit is the one who makes this presence known to us.

Jesus promised to not leave them orphaned and that he was going to send another Advocate, someone who will love them as much as he did. If the Holy Spirit is another Advocate, then that means there has been an Advocate already,Jesus.

Because Jesus is, also, our Advocate, we are invited then to imagine our way of understanding the role of the Holy Spirit, and that is through reading the Gospel up until this point and notice what Jesus has done; to take notice of the experiences and encounters Jesus provides. To have seen Jesus at work is to anticipate what the work of the Holy Spirit is.

What did Jesus do? Jesus advocated for the sick, for the poor, for those who were on the margins of society, for those who grieved, for the

lonely and widows and the left behind, in other words, the orphaned, for God's people to live in communion with one another and with God, and Jesus advocates for us.

Jesus' farewell to the disciples tells them and us a few more things about the work of the Holy Spirit. First we hear that this is the Spirit of truth. Last week we heard that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Second we hear a few chapters away that when the spirit of truth comes, the spirit will guide us all truth. The truth is Jesus, and the Spirit will guide us as Jesus has done. And third, when the Spirit comes, the Spirit will abide with you and will be in you. The coming of the Spirit, the promise of the Spirit, means that the disciples and us will not be orphaned.

The disciples needed to hear that they would not be orphaned. They needed to hear that Jesus would send to them an Advocate. They needed to hear that Jesus would be coming to them, through the Holy Spirit, to guide them.

What do we need to hear today? We always need to hear that we have an Advocate. We need to hear that the Spirit encourages us and supports us. We need to hear that when we feel disenfranchised, heart-broken, not heard, left behind, or left out, it's ok. We need to hear that when we feel like our back is up against the wall that someone has our back.

We need to hear that though there are times in life when we feel abandoned and orphaned, God is with you, here and now and always.

What we really need is to hear the whole story told again. We need to hear that God so loved us that God came in Christ in order that we might see God and what God wants for each us. We need to hear that God came in Christ and was willing to suffer and die on the cross so that we might know how much God loves us. We need to hear that this was not enough so God raised Jesus from the dead to show us that, nothing, not even death, can keep God from loving us, and we need to hear that that still wasn't enough. So, God continues to come to us in the Holy

John 14: 15-21 Cycle A

Spirit in order to encourage us and look out for us and to care for us
and to stay with us and walk along side us.

And to this, the people of God say.....Amen.

That's right.