

BLESSED ASSURANCE



Scripture:

Acts 16:9-15

⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

John 14:23-29

²³Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I

am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



BLESSED ASSURANCE

Today is May Day! It's been ten years since I began working as a Minister of Word and Sacrament on this day in 2006. The Presbyterian Church in Morristown called out May Day, May Day, and God sent me to them for seven and a half years. And now I am here. What a journey we are all on together! I am so grateful to God for sending me here now.

MAY DAY

I have a few fun facts about this May Day holiday. The earliest May Day celebrations appeared in pre-Christian times with a celebration called the *Floralia*, festival of Flora, (flowers) who was the Roman goddess of flowers.

In ancient Europe they considered May first to be the first day of summer.



When I was growing up in Iowa, my Mom would drive me to our neighboring farm houses and I would sneak up and hang May baskets full of goodies on their doors anonymously. I continued this tradition when my kids were small. Did your family give May baskets? I have fond memories of making up the baskets with flowers and

treats and imagining the joy they would bring when the May baskets were discovered.

It was a way of spreading love anonymously around the neighborhood.

KEEP GOD'S WORDS

This passage in the book of John is a reminder of the command to not only love God but to "keep God's words" in your heart and mind. It promises here that if you keep God's word "they" will come to you and "make their home" with you.

Isn't that an interesting way to put it? The use of the word "we" is a reflection on God being more than one, when it says, "We will come to you and make our home with you." Not "I", but "we," a direct connection to the Trinity, our triune God which includes the Son and the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Then this theme flows into the next passage that is a reassurance about the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, coming to remind the disciples of God's words and peace. This is a prediction of the day of Pentecost which for us is now just two Sundays away. (Everyone – please remember to wear red or orange or yellow that day to match the flames of the Holy Spirit.)

So Jesus reminds his disciples how to show their love of God, and he promises they will not be abandoned and left without comfort, guidance, and peace when he is gone. He assures them he is going to send an

Advocate in his name to be with them always.

FAREWELL DISCOURSE

I chose this passage in John for today from our lectionary readings because I love this farewell discourse for three reasons.

1. It shows Christ deeply cared about leaving his beloved disciples well prepared and peaceful for their future ministries in his name.
2. Christ role modeled authenticity in his anticipation of leaving and he didn't sugar coat or minimize his plans for departure.
3. The Holy Spirit is called our Advocate here. Christ sends an advocate behind not just for these few disciples back then but for us now.

OUR ADVOCATE

We too can call upon this Holy Spirit Advocate any time of day or night and we will get a response. The key is to be aware of that response when it comes. Maybe it comes as a sudden peaceful feeling in the midst of stress. It may come as a clarity of mind in making a hard decision, or the Holy Spirit can come as an advocate in the shape of another person who shows up to walk along for a while in your journey of life.

SERENDIPITY OR HOLY SPIRIT?

When we are aware, we can see evidence of the presence of God's Holy Spirit with us always all around.

Jonathan Steele told a wonderful story about this in our session meeting for the devotion time last Tuesday. When he was motorcycling around the country last summer, he happened to make a new friend when he least expected it. Someone that he wasn't really planning to speak with struck up a conversation with Jonathan in a diner

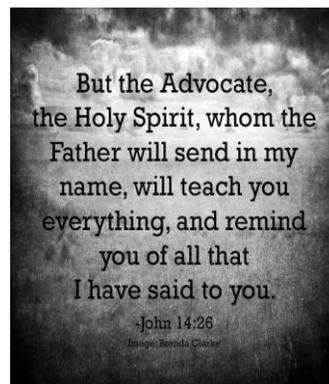
while he was resting. When Jonathan decided to share with this guy how difficult his recent journey had been in rain and wind on his bike, the guy suddenly said, "But God was with you through it all." This stunned Jonathan because this is quote he always carries on a card in his wallet. It says: "God is with me through it all." Serendipity or Holy Spirit?

Maybe that interaction with the stranger could also be called Blessed Assurance that Jonathan's motorcycle trip was going to be okay. He was going to make it home. And he did, but not before he made a new friend who shared his mutual faith in Christ.

A GREAT GIFT

When Jesus promised the disciples he would send an advocate who would have their backs and grant them peace and understanding rather than stress and confusion, that was a great gift!

Knowing how compassionate and empathic Jesus was, it must have been difficult for him to say "Goodbye" to a group of people he had come to know and love very deeply. So he did all he could to prepare them before and after his resurrection. Later it says in John 17, Jesus prays for them and for their protection in the future.



The Holy Spirit is called our Advocate here. Christ sends an advocate not just for these few disciples back then but for us now.

It is hard for us to trust in this, but literally and spiritually WE ARE NEVER ALONE. Jesus promised he would be with us to the end of the age. And he is with us through the power of the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and guide who the Bible says helps us pray when we don't know how to pray. We can trust in this Blessed Assurance, and live our lives with the kind of peace that only Christ can give.

Benediction:

Once when asked what he would do if he was told the world would end tomorrow, Martin Luther replied, "I would plant a tree today."

That's not optimism, but hope; not simply a lack of fear, but courage; and the kind of peace that comes from Jesus and the Holy Spirit, a peace the world cannot give.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
May 1, 2016**