

It is yet another addition of the Thursday ponderings with PJ – Hope you will have your thought process moved a little today. I am still living with the idea of “comfort” that I mused on last week. In times of high-anxiety it is only natural to seek out and find our comfort and turn to those people and places etc., that have given that “comfort” in our past experience. We all, if we start to think about it, have those things in our daily lives that we do just because it gives us a sense of “comfort” and control. We turn to our favorite television show, we fix our “comfort” food for dinner. For Sarah and I, that would be grilled cheese and tomato soup. And the many other things that we do to find “comfort” and control in our life. So, it is hard in the midst of a pandemic with a pernicious disease that spreads so easily to find “comfort” when there seems to be no controlling this thing that seems to be in the very mist.

Of course, one of those places that we all have found “comfort” is in the sacred space of gathering for worship and even that, for very good reasons, has been suspended for now. There is good reason for us to continue to think very carefully about what it means to love our neighbor in our Christian witness by doing everything possible to stem the tide while we can. Granted, we here in the more rural areas of Illinois have not experienced as much Covid 19 related illness as other places, but it is here, and it only takes one person. Because of the asymptomatic nature of many people who carry the virus and do not know they have it and spread it around, we have to be ever vigilant especially in those contexts with vulnerable people. As much as we want to be in our “comfort” zones we also are learning some new things about ourselves and developing some new and different ways of being in the world while self-distancing and isolating as much as possible. Developing some new “comfort” zones and ways of being with each other, if you will. And, we know that there is no such thing as zero risk in life but this is one thing that we can still do to mitigate this particular risk at this time.

This is where the John text is hitting me today. Although translating the Greek word “Paraclete” as comforter would be down the list of wooden lexical translations, I still think it has import for our ponderings today. In John 14:15 of our text this week we have Jesus saying, “If you all love me then you all will keep my commands.” And what has Jesus Commanded? To love our neighbor as ourselves, and then in the very next verse (16) Jesus says that he will ask the Father to send another. The “paraclete” the advocate/encourager/accompanier/comforter. This is where we can find comfort in the midst of being stuck not doing what we are used to doing whenever we want to do it. The Spirit will accompany us through this as we participate in God’s love to our neighbor. “Pneuma” is another word that gets translated for the Holy Spirit and it is basically Greek for breath – Interesting to me that in our text this Sunday in John 14:17 it is linked to truth. A disease that attacks the respiratory system is wreaking and has wreaked havoc on our breath as a community both physically and metaphorically. I believe that we have an opportunity to show how great a Christian witness we have by behaving in AGAPE love. By breathing that love in God’s Spirit. AGAPE is lifted up in our Gospel reading this Sunday 5 times, Once, in verse 1, and four times in verse 21, and it basically means “sacrificial love.” May we continue to breathe the breath of God’s sacrificial love and not of disease to our neighbor.

Hope these ponderings stimulate, irritate, enlighten, and continue to work faith in us all as we continue to navigate a new reality for us at this moment in time.

Peace,
Pastor Jeff