

John 14:15-21 THE ADVOCATE

Some time ago, not long after my mother passed away, I had a revelation. I was in my previous parish, and had been supporting both my parents through the last few years of their lives. Dad had died of dementia six months earlier at the age of 78, and then my mother lost her fight with pneumonia. She was also 78.

In the midst of my grief, my revelation was this: "I'm an orphan! I might be in my 50's, but now I'm an orphan!" I imagine in that sense, most of us here are orphans.

Jesus uses this word orphan in our Gospel reading this morning. It is such an emotive term, isn't it?

For us, the word orphan would normally conjure up images of sad little children left alone in the world without parents to love them or provide for them. In New Testament times, the word orphan didn't necessarily mean that a child had lost both parents, though it could mean that. It usually meant that a child was fatherless. And back then, a child's mother - the widow - was in just as desperate a situation as a fatherless child would be.

For a child to be orphaned, he or she, was in a difficult place indeed.

1. For the orphan, there was the agonising loss of the simple human provision of a parent's **love & encouragement** - those things we are all so dependent upon to thrive.

There is a rather awful urban legend about an experiment on a group of orphaned babies in Russia. According to the story, the babies were divided into two groups. One group of babies was picked up, cuddled & talked to as well as being fed & changed. The other group simply had their physical needs met. The babies that had loving human contact thrived, but most of those without loving human interaction got sick and died, even though their physical needs were met. This story may or may not be true, but it makes a valid point. Love & encouragement are critical to healthy human development.

I think sometimes, we underestimate our value as parents to our our children. Even if we feel we didn't do the best job of parenting, if we loved our children as they grew up, we gave them the very best thing we could have given them.

2. The orphan would also experience the immediate loss of **security**. There would be no more financial provision by the father for the household. Orphans would either be moved around amongst family members till one agreed to

take them in, or depending on their age, they might be left to their own devices to eke out a living from begging. Orphans and widows were completely dependent on the goodwill of their wider families and their community

3. Then for the orphan, there would be the loss of **guidance**. Without a father, orphans had no one to teach them the laws of their faith and their culture or to guide them in the ways of the world. They would grow up being confused, scared, and lost.

Though I imagine not many of us were orphaned as children, each of us will have at some time in our lives, felt a similar sense of loss. We will all at some point have experienced a loss of love, or we'll have found ourselves without security, or we'll have felt confused or lost.

We can experience any or all of these things just through “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”, as Shakespeare put it. And so the promise Jesus gives his disciples in this passage are just as applicable to us - and on more than one level.

At this point in Jesus' ministry, he was preparing himself to face the cross, and also preparing his disciples to face the sense of loss his death would bring.

Last week, we read Jesus' words about preparing a place for his disciples in his Father's house, and how he would return to collect them. Today's passage continues on from there, and in the verses we've just read, Jesus focuses on what will be in store for his disciples as they remain behind.

He is very, very, aware that they will soon be plunged into grief & despair, & into insecurity and confusion; into weakness & disillusionment.

Jesus assures his fearful disciples that he will ask the Father to give them another “*advocate*”. ([Joh 14:16](#)). The Greek word is *paraclete*. We haven't got a word in our language that really expresses the rich, powerful meaning of that word. It is a combination of a number of things - *advocate, intercessor, comforter, helper, witness & judge, someone who comes alongside us and is always there for us*. One word - *paraclete* - means all of that!

The Message translation renders this Greek word as “friend.” Not friend as in acquaintance. Friend as in best friend, or best mate. If we've ever had a really close friend, -someone who has stuck by us through thick and thin, who has loved us, warts and all, who has been completely faithful, forgiving,

encouraging, honest, and unfailingly there for us - then I suspect that we could begin to grasp what the term '*paraclete*' encompasses.

What does Jesus mean by "another" advocate? Simply that they have already had an advocate in the person of Jesus himself, during his earthly ministry. But Jesus was going to die, so he would ask his father to send "another" advocate, who would be with them forever.

This *advocate*, this *paraclete* would be given to Jesus' disciples, sent at his request. But, there are conditions, as we're reminded in verse 15. "If you love me," says Jesus, "You will obey my commandments. *Then* I will ask the father to send the advocate". The *paraclete* is given only to those who have received the Son, loved Him, and kept His commandments.

So what is the role of the advocate/paraclete for Jesus followers?

This is a whole study in itself, as there are many passages in the New Testament about the role of the Holy Spirit, but if we look just at today's reading, we find these things:

1. Jesus - as the advocate - is full of love for us. He will not leave us all alone, hurt, confused and grieving. He says "I will not leave you orphaned - **I will come to you**" (v18) This is such a promise of love, isn't it? "I will come to you."

When one of our boys was quite small - perhaps 4 or 5, - he had a dreadful nightmare during the night. I woke up to his little voice screaming "Mummy! Mummy!" What would any parent do? I leaped out of bed and raced into his room. He had his little fists scrunched into his eyes, and was all tensed and crying. I just sat next to him on the bed, wrapped my arms around him, speaking softly to him, and after a while he relaxed and went back to sleep.

That's what Jesus says he'll do for us - "I will come to you." He knew what his followers would go through - I'm sure it was part of what tore him apart when he prayed in agony in the garden. He knows what each of us goes through. He says, "I will come to you."

2. Jesus then promises that the advocate will '**abide with/live with**' the disciples (v17) - and more than that, he will literally be **in** them, and this will be **forever** (v16) Here is the answer to the orphan's loss of security. Jesus promises his presence with the followers he loves for ever. Whatever our circumstance, we are not alone. He is with us when we are over the moon with joy, and he is with us when we are in the depths of despair. He can't get any closer to us than being within us.

And while Jesus dwells in each disciple personally, He also abides with us corporately. He gathers us and makes us one. He will never abandon us.

The advocate also provides Jesus' followers with a **future** - something no orphan could imagine. In v19, Jesus alludes to his death when he says that the world will no longer see him - but then after a while, he says, his disciples **will** see him, and he promises them that because he lives - eternally - so would they. This is our future also, as followers of Jesus. We **will** see him.
I, for one, cannot wait.

3. Jesus promises that the advocate will give us **Guidance & instruction**. I doubt Jesus' followers would have understood a lot of what Jesus was saying to them at this point, as his coming death would not be something they would be taking in. But then we read in v 26 (not in our reading this morning) where Jesus says, **"But 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."**

I sometimes think of the great theological tomes that line the shelves of the St Mark's Library in Canberra. Far greater minds than mine have wrestled with these issues of eternity. And I am grateful for their scholarship. But when it comes down to it, our relationship with Jesus is an intimate one. It is a relationship of great respect, yes, but also one of love and friendship. And when we walk with a friend, and something needs to be said to us, a good friend will say it. So often, the things we need to hear from God, come to us as the Holy Spirit whispers them into our innermost beings.

As we learn to discern the Spirit's voice, he is not only present with us and in us, he not only comes to us when we need his help and encouragement, he literally speaks to us, reminding us of the words and teachings of Jesus.

"I will not leave you orphaned" said Jesus. **"I will come to you."**

Let's pray.