First United Presbyterian Church of Malad

May 14, 2023

Things My Mother Taught Me

John 14:15-21

**The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

**15**“If you love me, you will keep[a] my commandments. **16**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,[b] to be with you forever. **17**This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be[c] in[d] you.

**18**“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. **19**In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. **20**On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. **21**They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Growing up, I had a pretty atypical childhood. You see, I was born with a double cleft lip and a cleft palate. These days, those types of birth defects can be resolved with one or two very simple operations. Back in 1963, though, it was a different story. Reconstructive surgery existed, but was not readily available to folks, like my parens, who didn’t have the financial means to travel to the University of Pittsburgh, where many of the corrective techniques were being developed at that time.

So, my parents entrusted the necessary surgeries to our General Practitioner. This involved multiple, annual operations starting when I was just 3 days old and continuing right up to my 29th birthday.

Through it all, my mother was there for me. Never once did I wake up from an operation and not have her face be the first thing I saw. Even after I had left home and was making my own way in the world, my Mom would make a point of being there whenever I had a surgery scheduled. Never once was I made to feel orphaned or abandoned. What she taught me, by being there no matter what, was the beauty of unconditional love.

And that’s what today’s gospel passage is about; the unconditional love of God.

The reading from John is a continuation of what’s known as Jesus’ final discourse; the last conversation he had with his disciples during the Last Supper. If you follow the Lectionary, last week’s gospel reading tells us that Jesus is going to prepare a place for his followers in God’s house. This week, Jesus is, again, reassuring his friends that even though they won’t be able to see him, God is sending another Advocate to guide and comfort them. I love how the writer of John puts it in verse 18: *“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”*

You see, Jesus was very aware of the fact that his eminent departure was going to leave his follows feeling abandoned and alone. But Jesus knew that in order to fulfill God’s plan, he had to suffer crucifixion and death on the Cross. And in those final moments, when nobody would have blamed Jesus for thinking about what was to come, to the exclusion of all else, here he is comforting and reassuring his friends that they wouldn’t be left out in the cold, fumbling around without someone there for them.

Another name for the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and I think that’s what Jesus had in mind when he assured his friends that everything was going to be OK. I love this name for the Holy Spirit, because it invokes the comfort I’ve had the privilege of experiencing in my relationship with my own mother.

But, I also have to acknowledge that it isn’t always smooth sailing between mom and I. There are, in fact, times when our relationship is quite rocky. We are both very strong willed, stubborn Irish folk, and that can lead to some pretty spectacular arguments when we both get, what my grandmother referred to as, our Irish up. In spite of this, and even when it appears that one of us has gone too far, I’ve never doubted the fact that mom will always be there to provide comfort to me when I’m going through a bad patch.

And that’s just the type of foundation Jesus is talking about here. Even though Jesus no longer walks among us, in the physical sense, God, through the promise of the Holy Spirit, is present in our day to day life.

It’s our faith that opens the door to the presence of the Holy Spirit. It’s our belief that God will not leave us abandoned or orphaned, that gives us the strength and courage to carry on, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

Now, I’ll admit that there are times when my faith wavers. There are times when I struggle with my belief, and there are times when I get angry with God. This usually happens when I’m experiencing difficult times. I suspect that I’m not along in finding it hard to hold on to the promise of God’s presence, when things get tough. I think part of my problem, at times, is the fact that I just can’t hop in my truck and drive down to Ogden and visit with God face to face, as I’m able to do with my mother.

But, here’s the thing; God’s love for each and every one of us is unconditional. No matter what happens in our individual lives, or the life of our communities or the life of our congregations, God will alway be there.

We’ve all experienced hard times in the past and we’ll all experience hard times in the future; that’s just the reality of being human. The key to dealing with this reality is remembering that God doesn’t abandon his own. God will never leave us, even if our faith is shaken.

God promised to sent the Holy Spirit; the Comforter, to guide us through this thing we call life. It is an amazing promise and all we need to do to see that promise fulfilled, is to simply trust that God is true to his word.

So, your job is to find ways to hold on to your faith, and trust in God’s promises, even when life throws you curveballs. God’s unconditional love is there for all of us, even when it doesn’t seem like it. This is blessed assurance, indeed. AMEN