

Sermon

Jesus Keeps His Promises

John 14:15-21

17th May 2020

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As I read through John chapter 14, I was struck by how detailed John's record of the night before Jesus' death is and how it is FULL of Jesus' love for his Father and his desire that people come to know his Father.



Here is a famous icon painted by Rublev, a Russian artist born about 1360. The main thing Rublev is trying to convey in this painting is the honour & love & submission of each member of the Trinity to the others. The medieval style may be unfamiliar, but it was painted to be like a window through which to see truth. It is designed to be gazed at and pondered upon.

It acts as a virtuous circle – I expect you have heard of a vicious circle – this is a virtuous one.

Jesus wants us to come to know his Father, to receive the peace the Father will bring; the Father wants us to receive the Holy Spirit whom he will send. The Holy Spirit wants to help us be transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

But, do you see the gap in the middle front? – it is there as an invitation. Each member of the Trinity wants you to take your place in the circle of love, to be loved, to be deeply known by them and to deeply know them.

On the left, the Father has already lifted up his foot, ready to take the first step to lift us up and into the circle of love. This is the invitation of today's reading from John 14, which is full of Jesus' compassion and wisdom.

But it is also packed with his promises. Seven in seven verses! Jesus was going away, but he promised to come back. I want to talk about four different layers of fulfilment of these promises to return.

The first promise to have been fulfilled is in verse 18: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." When parents die and a child is left an orphan, there is no hope. There is a feeling of abandonment.

The child has to go it alone in life, without mother or father to offer guidance and help.

Jesus says, “**I will not** leave you as orphans, I will come to you.” And sure enough, after suffering death on our behalf, he came to them in his resurrection body and gave them his peace. His disciples were in lockdown, afraid for their lives.

He kept his promise to come to them. That’s what I call his Easter promise, which extends to us, too. When we ask Jesus to be our Lord and saviour, we don’t need to go it alone either. He comes to live inside us by his Holy Spirit! We don’t have to tough it out all by ourselves when life throws curved balls at us. We have a kind of inner steadiness that stops us from being blown about by every buffeting wind of challenge and change.

Verse 16 records the promise that Jesus will ask the Father, who give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. Sometimes that word advocate is translated counsellor. But it’s not just someone to give advice but more like the counsel for the defence in a law-court.

The reason for their need for another counsellor, or advocate, was that when we sign up for the Kingdom of God, we find out that it’s not just sweetness and light all the time – there is a battle to be fought to stand our ground and to press forward and help bring the Kingdom of God on earth.

When Jesus walked with the disciples in the three years of his ministry, they were shielded somewhat from Satan. Jesus had won a decisive victory in the wilderness temptations. That’s when Satan was tempting him to deny that he was the Son of God and to believe that God’s timing and God’s provision was not enough. He also tempted Jesus to go it alone and do things his own way. Satan withdrew after his defeat.

When Jesus had ascended to heaven, the disciples would be needing help as Satan would be wanting to ruin the fledgling church. What they would need, is the Spirit of Truth, so that when Satan whispered his lies into their ears, the Spirit of Truth would help them discern the truth about Father God, about Jesus and about their place in the scheme of things.

It’s so easy to listen to the voice that says, “Oh just roll over and get some more sleep. You deserve it. You need it. Missing one Sunday at church won’t matter.” Or the voice might say, “You’re not that great a Christian. I don’t know why you even bother to try.”

That’s when we need the Spirit of Truth. Jesus is not here in bodily form to teach us and we need to be instructed “on the job” about all sorts of things – our value to God, our importance in the body of Christ, our true identity in Christ and instructions for specific things along the way. We need his Spirit within us, and other disciples around us, to encourage us and help us pay attention to the truth.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room, breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” I wonder if that was like an initial opening the door of their hearts to the Holy Spirit. It reminds me of the movie, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” where Aslan breathes on the frozen statues and they gradually come back to life. Sometimes the moving of God upon us is that gentle: colour and life coming from top to toe like the pink flush over a newborn baby as he or she begins to breathe.

50 days later, at Pentecost, their experience of the Holy Spirit was much more intense.

It was like the difference between the sound from one little handheld radio, and the huge, surround-sound speakers in a movie theatre whose reverberation vibrates the seat you’re sitting on, and seems to resound inside your chest. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came in power and went deeper, as it were. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit, totally immersed and filled, and that was Jesus’ promise coming true. Father God sent the Spirit to help them, defend them and empower them to do what needed to be done and to face what needed to be faced.

It’s one thing to feel the breath of the Spirit and open yourself to him, and another to have the Holy Spirit inside you, counselling and empowering you to face the challenges of life. Many people around the world and through the ages have found that God comes to them in deeper ways as they invite him to.

Then Jesus gave them His “I Will Return” promise. During the history of the church there have been devastating times during which the return of the Lord seemed imminent and people would, as it were, hold their breath, waiting for Jesus’ physical return.

In v20 Jesus uses something like a secret code that the Jewish people knew – the phrase, “On that day”. Everyone listening would have known the meaning, because it was constantly repeated in the Old Testament by many prophets, “On **that** day,” or “on the Day of the Lord.” So he was referring to the day when he would come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, as the creed says. So in v20, that’s his promise, “**On that day** you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”



Here is something that helps us see this promise. This is a Russian *babushka* doll. There is a big one, and others that sit inside.

The inside dolls are covered, protected, safe and held in love. They have their own space carefully crafted just for them. They fit together, but as we let them speak of the truth of Jesus’ words, “I am in my Father and you are in me”, I also think of CS Lewis’ observation that, “sometimes what is in the inside is greater than what is on the outside.”

This metaphor gives us the start of understanding, but we will not understand the fullness of that mystery until he comes again. “On that day, you will realise that I am in the Father and you are in me and I am in you.” Part of the understanding, is

that when Jesus died, we died too, so that we could die to the old life and be raised to live a new life in Christ. Baptism is a picture of dying and being raised in Christ. Going under the water, as it were dying, and being raised to new life.

The beauty of that is, when we die to the old life, it’s gone! We now live in Jesus and when the old habits and temptations come knocking, we can say, “Jesus, would you answer the door, please?” And he sends them packing.

But this second-coming promise still puzzles me a bit. Maybe it does you too. What is so special about understanding that Jesus is in the Father, we are in Jesus and he is in us? Well, I am really glad you asked. The time is coming, when I am going to want to really experience my life being hidden with Christ in God.

Jesus is coming again and there are some mind-blowing things that are going to happen. He speaks of them particularly in Matthew 24, describing signs that will alert us just beforehand – earthquakes, famines and the like. Then he talks of persecution of his followers and great distress around the world, all the nations mourning and then the Son of Man coming on the clouds in glory. Matt 25 tells us how to prepare, but when Jesus sends out his angels to gather his people from all around the world, it will be truly awe-inspiring. At that point, I for one will be quaking in my trainers. That’s the time when I am going to want to really understand that my life is hidden with Christ in God. Safer than safe.

One of the things that has been circulating on the internet during these past few weeks is about the vaccine they are trying to develop against COVID-19. People are predicting that it will become the mark of the beast, which is mentioned in the book of Revelation. There is loose talk about us being secretly injected with a microchip at the same time. They talk about us not being able to buy food at the shop, transact business, go swimming at the pool etc., etc. - unless we can prove we have been vaccinated against COVID-19. That is supposed to be the mark of the beast.

I would like to caution you against focussing on such distressing ideas that have their roots in fear. For one thing, the book of Revelation says that the mark will be on the forehead or the hand. As a nurse, I know that vaccine injections are never given in the forehead or hand. So don’t be afraid of the COVID-19 vaccine, if it ever comes. It will probably be in the upper arm, like the flu vaccine. And when the time does come for the mark of the beast being taken by many people, we will have the Holy Spirit, our counsellor with us, to give us wisdom and courage when we need it. He will speak very clearly, directly to us and show us what to do. We

will know beyond a shadow of a doubt what our action needs to be. He will not let us accidentally deny Jesus. He will enable us to operate in faith, obeying his voice, not reacting out of fear.

So I have talked about three of the promises in this passage. Now let's think about how we position ourselves to receive those promises, because they are not automatically ours. According to Jesus, we need two things in order to inherit these promises.

Verse 15: "If you love me, you will obey what I command." At the moment, we are being told what to do by the Government at the moment and we are told that it is very important – that we will bring danger to ourselves and to others if we disobey what they say.

How much more important is it for us to hear and obey the King of Kings, the one who has promised us that we will be safe FOREVER? He says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." That is probably, "If you love me, then automatically, out of the fullness of your love, you'll want to do everything you can to obey me."

I think back to when I was first engaged. Not to Ian, to another man. I was star-struck, because the man was the catch of the whole church, handsome, clever – and he liked me!

But as the engagement wore on, I came to realise that when there was something I thought was very important, he would not necessarily treat the thing as if it was important. It would not be his top priority, whatever he SAID when I confronted him about it.

Now, married to Ian, when he says, "I function best and feel most comfortable when things are orderly in the home," I do my best to keep the place tidy. That's my aim. That's one way I show my love to him.

And if my Lord Jesus says "Jump!"- if I love him I won't say, "Well, I'll give it some thought. Maybe."... Love says, "Yessir! How high?"

But how do we know what Jesus commands if we don't read the book? This should be a real incentive to read the Gospels particularly. Don't just wait to get them second-hand, drip-fed by the Vicar or the internet! Don't get me wrong - It's good to receive from Ian's teaching. God has given him that special gift and responsibility in the church, but he has limited opportunity to teach us and there's no substitute for doing our own reading and learning. We will be accountable on that Day for the way we handled the Bible – and for how we responded to the instruction of our counsellor, the Holy Spirit.

Now let's look at the fourth promise: Verse 21: "The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

"I will show myself to them." Fascinating! How is he going to show himself to us? He showed himself to the disciples in the Upper Room, again and again over a period of 40 days before his Ascension.

I wonder if any of you has had the Lord Jesus show himself to you. Some of you could give testimony, I am sure. I have not personally experienced Jesus coming in his solid resurrection body, but I have seen him when he came in a vision in my mind and I have sensed his presence in my heart. Remember what the disciples said, who had been with Jesus on the road to Emmaus: "Didn't our hearts burn within us when he opened the Scriptures to us?"

And lastly to the fifth promise- verse 19: "Because I live, you also will live." That can't just mean, that because he lives, we get a normal 3-dimensional existence. We already have that.

This is Jesus' promise, that because the Father would so infuse Him with power, He would be resurrected from the grave. And for us, we won't automatically follow the train tracks to a dead end, but we'll be given an amazing, new body like Jesus got. And because we are in him and He in us, we get immortality too. We need never fear death. Never. He promised. He promised to come, with the Spirit of Truth, to never leave us, to disclose himself to us.

"I will not leave you as orphans, standing alone with all your possessions packed into one small suitcase. I come to give you life – life to the full!"

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