**SERMON May 25/26 2019**

“Jesus Sends Us”

John 14:23-29

How many of you have that one friend in your life -- the one who always seems to know the ending of a movie way before you do? The one who blurts out the ending and is often correct, spoiling the movie for everyone else? (wait for hands) That’s what I thought, almost all of us have “that friend.” All my life, watching movies and TV shows or reading books with my mother is both the BEST and the WORST. My mom is a writer and storyteller and is eerily good at projecting what the end of the story line is going to be. It has taken us some time, but we’ve finally reached an agreement that she is allowed to tell me “I know what’s going to happen,” but won’t actually tell me until AFTER the movie, or AFTER I finish reading a book. That way I can enjoy getting to the end without unintentional “spoilers”. The mystery holds.

This is one of my mother’s most charmingly annoying traits. On the one hand sometimes I wish she would remain in the mystery with me a bit longer, and on the other I know that if I miss plot points she knows the story well enough that I can ask her about it later and she will fill me in on what I missed. One of the most memorable moments like that that we had was after I finished the sixth Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* – it was always a mad dash to get the book first, race through it and THEN share it with my family. I was SO EXCITED to give it to my mom so she could read it and I looked forward to discussing it with her. I wanted her to read every word and be as hooked and surprised at the end as I was. And I remember she gave me back the book the next day and said “I got through chapter 3, I know the ending, it’s […..]” and SHE WAS RIGHT! I. was. flabbergasted.

There’s an important distinction to be made, I think, between foreshadowing and spoilers. (SLIDE) Good stories often include foreshadowing as a literary device and they can help us make a guess at how things are going to turn out. Spoilers, on the other hand, tell us EXACTLY what’s about to happen. And as much as I love discussing foreshadowing, character development and where we think the story MIGHT go, I hate when someone “ruins” the end of a story for me by telling me exactly what is going to happen – whether they are just a lucky guesser or because they’ve already seen the movie or show or read the book before me. (SLIDE)

Reading the passage this morning from John chapter 14 I can’t help but wonder if Jesus isn’t considered “that one friend” by the Disciples. We could consider this passage a mere foreshadowing of Pentecost but notice that Jesus is not wishy-washy at all here. He isn’t saying “I think this is what might happen,” or asking, “what do you think about this possible outcome?” No, he uses the word “WILL.” “Those who love me WILL keep my word.” “My Father and I WILL come make our home with them.” “My Father WILL send the Holy Spirit in my name and the Spirit WILL teach you everything.” At the end he even states “I have told you this before it occurs, so that WHEN it does occur, you may believe.” This seems kind of annoying – there is little mystery left for either the Disciples or for us. Yet it is extremely comforting both for the Disciples, and, I would humbly suggest, for us!

First, we must understand the context in which this passage is set. Jesus’ words here are taken from a larger section in John’s Gospel referred to as the “Farewell Discourse.” It is Jesus’ final conversation over what we now call “The Last Supper” with the Disciples. And the verses we read today were triggered by a question that Judas asked. William R. Herzog II reminds us in Feasting on the Word (a biblical commentary) that “This is privileged conversation… John’s gospel was probably written in Ephesus during the 80s or 90s of the first century, the period of time when the house churches were being evicted from the synagogue. Hostility was high, and mutual suspicion reigned. The fledgling house churches were keeping clear boundaries that separated them both from the synagogue and from the Roman temples in Ephesus.” Friends, Jesus was no stranger to Conflict, times of tension and those around him being consumed with anxiety and fear. Herzog rightly points out that, “Conflict can sharpen differences, as well as motivate groups to clarify their identity.” Huh. SOUND FAMILIAR? And I can’t help but wonder if that isn’t exactly what Jesus is working to do here – clarify the identity of this group of ragtag Disciples.

Now, I am no stranger to anxiety and fear, especially as a Middle School Youth Director! (Ha!) Not because I am terrified of your youth, but because I am wary of what exactly they will remember, hold on to, and take with them on their journey of faith. This is an important task, one I take quite seriously. And I know from experience that the things they remember will likely surprise themselves years from now. For example, I know that I went to youth group and the girl’s Bible study my church offered every week for years, yet I have only a few very sharp memories from that period of time. One of them came back to me this week as I prepared this sermon. Jesus says clearly that he and God will come and make their home with those who love and keep his word. And, all of a sudden, a clear image of a living room… kind of like this one (SLIDE) came back to me. My girls’ Bible study once did a study titled “My Heart, Christ’s Home” and we were encouraged to imagine an actual home in our mind’s eye. The image I came up with that evening sticks in my mind even today. Why this image and not another from a different Bible Study? Beats me! So, I admit to being a tad anxious beginning this position with your young people – what will ***they*** remember years from now? (SLIDE)

I suspect that I am not the only one anxious about something. We’re all human and you likely have something causing you anxiety or fear as well. Perhaps it is something at work or at home. Maybe it is over the current struggle to define the future of the United Methodist denomination. Perhaps last night’s news or something you read in the paper this morning has you feeling anxious. Just like Jesus’ Disciples, we are no strangers to living in anxious times (SLIDE). How comforting is it, then, to remember that Jesus was not speaking hypothetically here, but rather promising in no uncertain terms that he is leaving his peace with his Disciples? Jesus does not give to the Disciples – or to us – peace like the world gives. His peace is one that passes all understanding. (SLIDE). What a tremendous amount of comfort we are given in verse 27.

As I face the anxieties and fears of today, sometimes I find myself retreating to that living room in my mind’s eye to sit with God. And I have also found new and interesting ways to engage my own personal faith and relationship with God. One such way has been to listen to *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, a Podcast produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile and Vanessa Zoltan born, I believe, out of Harvard Divinity School’s chapel or chaplain’s office. Each week they read a chapter of a Harry Potter book through a particular lens and last week I listened to the episode where they read the last chapter of book one through the lens of LOVE. Although this is not a religious text they use reading practices based on their faith traditions, such as *Lectio Divina* (when you read the same passage 3 times in a row, each time listening for something new) and I have found it to be so thoroughly enjoyable to engage a story I know so well in this new way.

As I listened last week I was struck when one of the hosts made the very good point that “love does not need words in order to communicate.” This sounds reminiscent of the quote often attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the gospel daily; when necessary, use words.” These are helpful words for those of us learning how to follow Jesus’ directions which send us out as Christians into a world often unready or unwilling to hear the Good News of the gospel. It may be far less complicated than we tend to make it – perhaps all we need to do is love those to whom we are sent.

Last summer I was privileged to receive a scholarship which allowed me to attend the Wesleyan Pilgrimage in England. I traveled with about 30 other United Methodists from all over the world and we visited the heritage sites where Charles and John Wesley founded the Methodist movement in England. This trip and experience could not have come at a better time for me as I wrestled with what seemed like opposing truths – I feel called to be a United Methodist Clergywoman, and yet the denomination felt (and still feels) like it is hanging on by only a thread. On the last night of the Pilgrimage I was fretting over my call to ministry and the fact that I had not yet experienced anything that felt like a true “God moment.” And then I sat down in the chapel at the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine’s (SLIDE) in London and listened for God. Afterward I wrote this, little knowing that it was my sermon for today. I offer it now in hopes that my conversation with God that night might speak to you as well:

“So much of my identity is wrapped up in being United Methodist that I am feeling the weight of this next year and beyond. There’s this feeling I have that if the church splits, or becomes something else, that I will lose a huge part of myself and my identity. That all came crashing in on me tonight. But what I also received was a renewed sense of hope. And a reassurance that no matter what happens with our denomination, that God’s LOVE will continue to flow and that the Methodist model and movement will continue to live on for a long time to come. Because there will always be committed people who are passionate about the things we learned during this time that will keep the movement going.”

So, I took some time, and sat in the chapel alone at the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine’s, right in the middle of the compass on the floor (I am still searching for God’s guidance and direction). I cried. I listened. And I prayed this breath prayer the Spirit provided: ‘Breathe in Love. Breathe out Peace.’

And I think that is the key. If I – if we --continue to breathe in LOVE, to keep that as the life force that sustains us, then we will be equipped, and really, have no other choice than to exude PEACE into the world.

Breathe in LOVE.

Breathe out PEACE.

Breathe in LOVE.

Breathe out PEACE.

Breathe in LOVE.

Breathe out PEACE.

Amen.”

Friends inscribed around that compass on floor were the words “We do not come to God by navigation, but by love,” a quote from Augustine of Hippo. (SLIDE) This is as true for us who already strive to follow Jesus as it is for those who have yet to be invited in. Let us take heart at knowing that Jesus has already spoiled the ending for us. (SLIDE) As anxious and afraid as we may feel today, Jesus has already told us exactly what is going to happen. He is going to give us his peace. God is going to send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to remind us of all that Jesus has said. And it is simply our job to go out and to love one another and to share God’s love with those who do not yet know this Good News. Breathe in love. Breathe out peace. Breathe in love. Breathe out peace. Breathe in love. Breathe out peace.

Amen.