



## First United Church of Oak Park

### **And Also With You**

John 20

The Rev. John Edgerton

May 17, 2020

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

When I read these words, they brought it all home in an instant. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you — these are the words that introduce sharing the peace of Christ. How many times have I said these words in worship? Hundreds. I have spoken these words and then gone wading into the congregation like a kid on a hot summer day wading into the waves of Lake Michigan. Handshakes mixed in with hugs, spirited high fives from children without a thought or a shadow of a worry. Flooding back in with the words of Christ is being pressed in close on Christmas Eve, shoulder to shoulder to shoulder with strangers, waiting for the light of Christ to come to me.

I miss it. And I don't know when that is coming back. It may be something that the children of the congregation look back on as quaint, a relic of a bygone era, like hand-laced doilies under communion bread — lovely — but not how things are done anymore. I miss it. And I don't know when that is coming back.

Jesus was going to be leaving the Disciples, soon. He was trying to prepare them. Jesus was soon to be taken away from his Disciples, parted from them by the power of death. They were going to have to become Jesus' followers in a brand-new way. Being Jesus' follower wasn't easy, that's true, but it wasn't

complicated. Jesus went someplace, you followed him — not complicated. How can you follow someone who you can't physically be with, can't touch them, can't even lay your eyes on them?

Jesus knew things were changing, and so he prepared them. Jesus told his followers: Keep my commandments, and I will pray God send you another advocate, another helper, another comforter. The Greek word is *Paraclete*, and it is one of those words that if you try to pour the whole of its meaning into another single word, it will quickly fill it to the brim and overflow the sides and stain the tablecloth.

I will pray God send you another helper, another advocate, another comforter, the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells them that when he is parted from them, they will not be left as orphans. The Holy Spirit will brood over them like a mother hen, like the Spirit brooded over the waters of creation, like the Spirit slips into the waters of baptism on a baby's brow. This chapter of John contains one of the most substantial explanations of the Holy Spirit and even here it is a bit ... numinous, a bit hazy, a bit hard to grasp.

This new comforter, the Holy Spirit, shall be everywhere, Christ tells his followers. The Spirit will be inside of them, binding them together, transforming them and transforming the world. The Spirit will be everywhere and also not bound by any one place. This is always what it is like when talking about the Holy Spirit — hazy. But there is one thing that is crystal clear — how to know that the Holy Spirit has come.

Christ told them: “A new commandment I give to you. Love one another as I have loved you. If you keep my commandments, I will pray God send you another comforter.”

Love for one another. That is what brings the Holy Spirit near. Love for one another: It is not like some talisman or charm that summons the Spirit. Love for one another, this IS the Holy Spirit. This is how we feel the Holy Spirit. The place of intersection between my limitations and the immensity of God. When I intersect with God, it forms a line straight through me, and that line is love for one another. This is the Holy Spirit, sent of God, who is God.

The love we have for one another. This is the Holy Spirit, this IS God. When we love one another, it is an unmediated, unmitigated, unlimited, illimitable, unbreakable union with God. Distance cannot make our love for one another distant; separation cannot separate us from love for one another. When we love one another, that is the Holy Spirit, who is everywhere and also not bound by any one place.

When you call someone up, just to check on how they are and connect and share a bit of time — that is love. When you make masks by the dozen so that someone can go out grocery shopping and feel a bit safer, that is love. When you take one of these homemade masks and use it such that another person’s labors have found their intended end, that is love. When you pray for one another, that is love. When you are careful day after day with masks, gloves, soap, and distance, when you do all in your power to protect not only yourself but also others, when your actions place the health of others on an equal plane as your own, that is love.

The love we have for one another. This is the Holy Spirit, this IS God. When we love one another it is an unmediated, unmitigated, unlimited, illimitable, unbreakable union with God. Distance cannot make our love for one another distant; separation cannot separate us from love for one another. This is what Christ has given us, has left to us — he has not left us as orphans.

The peace of Christ. This does not come from a handshake, or a hug or a high five or being pressed shoulder to shoulder with another. Though I dearly miss those things, they are not the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding. The peace of Christ comes from our love for one another. I love you, beloved of First United Church, I love you.

Peace be with you.