Prayer

Comfort. One of the most moving passages in English literature comes towards the end of Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, a story of the French revolution. Each day, a grim procession of prisoners made its way on the streets of Paris to the guillotine. One prisoner, Sidney Carton, a brave man who had once lost his soul but had now found it again, was now giving his life for his friend. Beside him there was a young girl. They had met before in the prison, and the girl had noticed the man's gentleness and courage. She said to him, "If I may ride with you, will you let me hold your hand? I am not afraid, but I am little and weak, and it will give me more courage."

So they rode together, her hand in his; and when they reached the place of execution, there was no fear in her eyes. She looked up into the quiet composed face of her companion, and said, "I think you were sent to me by heaven."

Comfort. For several weeks running the number one song on country music charts was a ballad sung by John Michael Montgomery called "The Girl." The lyrics tell the sad story of a little girl who hid behind the couch while her drug addict mother and alcoholic father continually fought. They never went to church or spoke of the Lord (except in vain). The parents eventually died in a murder/suicide.

The state placed the child in a foster home where there were, as the little girl described, there were "kisses and hugs everyday." The foster parents took the little girl to Sunday school where she saw a picture of Jesus hanging on a cross. With a smile on her face the girl asked the teacher the identity of the man in the picture. "I don't know his name," the girl said, "but I know he got
off [the cross]...because he was there in my old house. He held me close to his side as I hid behind our couch the night that my parents died."

**Comfort.** Author Garry Friesen writes: My friend Reilly told me about his first visit to our church. Reilly says that after the service he lingered, talking to this person and that. When he stepped outside, his four-year-old daughter, Melody, did not come out. By then the building was empty, and the door was locked and could be opened only with a key.

Reilly called through the mail slot in the large oak door, "Melody are you in there?" A small frightened voice answered, "Yes, Daddy." Then Melody put her hand through the mail slot so Daddy could hold it until someone fetched a church key. Melody could not see him, but she knew her father was there, and she was comforted.

Each of you has your own stories of how you were comforted at a particularly difficult time in your life. There was someone there for you. It may have been a friend, a parent -- with the Holy Spirit working through them.

At the end of John, Chapter 13, Jesus tells the disciples he is going to die, that he will be killed, that he will be taken from them. Just before that revelation, probably not more than 5 or 10 minutes earlier, the disciples learned that someone they trusted and had lived with for three years was going to betray Jesus. Judas was going to see to it that the religious authorities captured Jesus.

You can imagine that the disciples were upset. Wouldn’t you be upset to find out that a person you loved and had been with for three years was going to die, not a natural death, but be killed at the hands of men? And from all you could understand, there was nothing you could humanly do to keep the death from happening.
For the disciples, the icing on the cake, so to speak, was the fact one of their number was going to play a part in seeing that Jesus died. You’ve probably had enough life experiences that you can almost feel the disciples distress and fear and anger – all the complex emotions that must have been running through their minds as Jesus revealed the events that were about to take place.

John, chapter 14 begins, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus knew the disciples were in emotional turmoil. They needed comfort. They needed to calm down so they could listen, so they could hear what he had to teach them in these few remaining hours they would be together before everyone scattered, before he died.

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus continues comforting the disciples. Just listen to Jesus’ words beginning at verse 18: 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.”

What comforting words. Jesus will not leave the disciples. They will not become orphans because he dies. Jesus will be with them. Jesus will love them and reveal himself to the disciples even after he’s left them. Even though the world will not see him, the disciples will know him.

Because we have the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, we know how Jesus will reveal himself to us; how he has been revealing himself to Christians for centuries. Yes, it is through the Holy Spirit’s actions, which Jesus tries to explain to the disciples at the beginning of reading today. Beginning at verse 5: 5 “If you love
me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, 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 in you.

The ‘another advocate’ is what we call the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. It’s interesting to me how Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as ‘another advocate.’ Another? Who came before? Christ. If you have your Bibles open, notice that the advocate is sent from God. (Verse 16) Who else was sent from God? Christ. The advocate will be rejected by the world. Verse 17 says the world cannot receive him. Who else did the world not receive, but outright reject? Christ. Verse 17 says the advocate will be the “spirit of truth.” Who else represents truth? Christ. No wonder Jesus says in verse 17, You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

Let’s look at verse 15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Jesus will send the advocate or the Holy Spirit if the disciples love Jesus and keep his commandments. We can only keep God’s commandments because we love God. If our motivation is otherwise, then we are like the Pharisees, the Jewish ruling elite that Jesus criticized because they loved the law, not God. They lived for laws not for God.

How do we keep Jesus’ commandments? Love one another. Jesus’ whole ministry was about loving and caring for the people he met. One example of that love takes place in the upper room. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. He who was the master, washed the feet of the servants – even the servant who was going to betray him. That’s love. In love, we share ourselves. We don’t ‘do’ something to others in service and sacrifice, but we share ourselves with them.
I opened with three examples of comfort, of service, of sharing. We can hold another person’s hand during a difficult time. We can love those who are scared. We can listen carefully for the Holy Spirit’s voice and encourage others who hear it. We can reach out to others and share God’s love and grace with them.

Comfort. Jesus’ words to his disciples provided comfort. He helped them to understand that he was going away, but he would be with them because the Father was sending the Advocate to take his place after he left. Though I’m not sure how comforting those words were to the disciples in that upper room. I do know that the Holy Spirit comforted and strengthened the disciples after Jesus’ death and resurrection. You can read how it all happened in the Book of Acts. Actually, in the Bible, comforter means to strengthen. The comforter, the Holy Spirit, strengthened the disciples for ministry.

Is this same advocate around today? Yes, the Holy Spirit is present and helping us today – right now, in fact. The Holy Spirit strengthens us today, as it strengthened the disciples then – as it strengthened Christians through the ages. It’s the same Holy Spirit today that was promised by Jesus in the upper room over two thousand years ago.

Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Love others as Jesus loves you. If we keep Jesus’ commandments, we will show others Jesus’ love. We will comfort people. We will comfort one another. How? The advocate will show us the way as we serve and sacrifice. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.