



Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing" Dandrieu

Gathering

Welcome and Announcements

Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is alive and among us now. Even as the light pushes back the dark, so to Jesus Christ has defeated death. Let us worship God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

* Call to Worship

Liturgist: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

All: The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

Liturgist: We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may also have fellowship with us.

All: And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
I John 1:1-4 adapted

All Singing: 199 "Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain"

God's Greeting
God's People Greeting One Another

Reconciliation

Liturgist: This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

All: If we claim to have fellowship with God and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

Liturgist: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

All: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

I John 1:5-9 adapted

All Singing: 635 "Kyrie Eleison" (Lord, Have Mercy)
Singing the Greek, three times through

Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison.

Silent Confession and Lament

Liturgist: My dear children, if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,

All: and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

I John 2:1-2 adapted

* **All Singing: 590 "Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"**

Liturgist: I John 4:16-21

Proclamation

Prayer for Illumination

All: God, source of all light, by your Word give light to our lives. Amen.

Scripture: I John 1:1 – 2:2

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: The Other Paraclete

* **All Singing: 682 "Before the Throne of God Above"**

Dedication

Prayers of the People

* **All Singing: 946 "Go, My Children, with my Blessing"**
Singing verses 1 and 2

Benediction

Postlude: "Jesus Shall Reign"

Albrecht

Worship Leaders

Organist / Pianist: Dora Diephouse
Sound / Video: Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister: Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Acolyte: Greda Gabrielse
Liturgist: Mary McKinstry
Prayer: Gerrit Veenstra
Vocalists: Chris Gabrielse

10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Maxton Pettinga
Liturgist: Mary Bontekoe
Prayer: Jack Hoekstra
Violin: David VanderWeele
Vocalists: Jim Kwasteniet
Aron Reppmann

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Text: I John 1:1 – 2:2
Title: The Other Paraclete
Date: 04.11.21
Roger Allen Nelson

Sandi and I were part of a trial in which we didn't get to pick our legal representation. We couldn't call a lawyer; we were assigned a lawyer from the State's Attorney office. She was Irish-American – Fitzgerald or Fitzpatrick or O'Flanagan. With dark red hair, fair complexion, and a no-nonsense demeanor, she looked like she went to Mother McAuley, DePaul University, Notre Dame Law, lived in Beverly, and on the weekends tended bar at the Cork and Kerry on Western Avenue.

We had no idea what to expect. Years of watching "Law and Order" and reading John Grisham novels left us ill equipped for an actual trial. It all felt overwhelming, surreal, and unsettling. Clearly there was a set of rules and a working culture that was the arena for the ordained and not for the laity. Therefore,...

we needed help,
we needed an advocate,
we needed someone to come along side us to make our case.

And, truth be told, I'd still like to thank the attorney we were assigned. She was kind, competent, and committed to truth, justice, and appropriate expressions of mercy. During the sentencing trial I was asked to give a "victim's impact statement" and she helped frame a compassionate clarity. Even when sitting in a crowded courtroom – abuzz with drama and emotion and uncertainty – it never felt like we were alone or adrift or without an advocate.

Everyone needs an advocate.

Everyone needs someone to come alongside to counsel, comfort, clarify and help make a case. Everyone needs someone to offer a defense, or help with an explanation, or navigate uncertainty. Everyone needs someone at their side to be on their side. Everyone needs an advocate.

In our text this morning, John writes that we're given an advocate.
John writes that Jesus is our advocate before God, the Father.

The Greek word, translated here as advocate, is a form of *paraclete*. In other places it gets translated as comforter or counselor. It's actually a compound of *para*, meaning, "beside" (think para-professional), and *kletos*, meaning "called" or "invited." A *paraclete* literally is "one who is called alongside" or "one invited next to." And, often used in a legal setting, a *paraclete* was one called beside to speak for, make a case, offer counsel, or encourage.

Who doesn't want a *paraclete*?

Who doesn't need someone to come alongside?

So, dear friends, what does it mean that Jesus is our *paraclete*?

What does it mean that Jesus is our advocate?

First a little about our text...

Despite being entitled First John, or the First Epistle of John, the author is not identified in the writing, and the text doesn't follow the template for letters of the day. Rather, it reads more like a mediation, or perhaps several sermons threaded together around common themes.

And, given that the language and themes of I John are also prominent in John's gospel, most scholars think there's some correlation between the author and/or the community that gathered around the Gospel of John. It was probably written by John or one of John's disciples.

And it was probably written toward the end of the first century for a community threatened by schism, with competing factions, and conflicting understandings of the nature of Jesus and the life of faith.

So....

So, the opening reads a great deal like the Gospel of John.

There's a big stage with big themes. There's reference to the beginning and eternity and light and life that became flesh – flesh that we saw and touched and heard. And that we have fellowship with. And, in that context, John writes that Jesus is our *paraclete*.

Jesus is our advocate with God.

Does that mean that Jesus is our lawyer?

Does that mean that in some cosmic courtroom Jesus is representing us, making our case, before God?

That's probably part of what we can understand here.

The Belgic Confession puts it this way:

We believe that we have no access to God except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor, "Jesus Christ the righteous," who therefore was made human, uniting together the divine and human natures, so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty. Otherwise, we would have no access.

But this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between himself and us, ought not to terrify us by his greatness, so that we look for another one according to our fancy. For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth is there anyone who loves us more than Jesus Christ does.

That's pretty remarkable!

If you exchange Mediator or Intercessor with advocate: We have no access to God, therefore God appoints for us an advocate who offers access and who loves us more than any other being in the whole cosmos! And our text reads that our advocate does more than come alongside to encourage and comfort but also provides "propitiation" or an "atoning sacrifice" for our sins.

And with that we've arrived at the formulation of an orthodox Christian cosmology: God as judge, us as guilty, and Jesus as both our advocate and the payment for our sin. Thanks be to God.

But, I wonder if there's another helpful/faithful way to think of Jesus as our advocate?

I was recently asked:

Do you ever struggle with your faith? I grew up in the church, but I feel like I lose my footing, slip away, get restless or rebellious and then feel guilty. I struggle back, only to do it again. I think I'm always in that cycle....

Do I struggle with faith?

Are the Cubs proverbial-perennial-loveable-losers?

This is my sweet spot....

All I've ever known is struggle.

I've been in the church my whole life – so in some fashion I've heard, seen, and touched Jesus my whole life. Through the church I've been shaped, nurtured, constricted, haunted, and held together by Jesus.

I'm tethered to Jesus. Even when I've tried, I can't quite cut the cord. It's a tangled knot of church, culture, family, and my own failings, demons, and inability to ever be at peace.

So, yes, at 61, I'm resigned to struggle as the defining quality of my spiritual life. Like the Cubs I'm going to struggle 107 times out 108, but there is that 1 time where there's peace, grace, mercy, and victory....

And, Jesus has given me a framework for hope and meaning, a community to live in and live out of, a text to inhabit, and a call to follow. I do the best I can to be honest at the intersection of life, scripture, Jesus, and embodied belief....

I believe, help my unbelief.

I don't believe, help me believe.

I live somewhere in there.

Maybe you do too....

But, dear friends, what if in that struggle there is also an advocate?

What if in that struggle there is also one who comes alongside to plead our case, to intercede, to counsel, to carry, and to encourage? What if in the struggle, no matter what the struggle, you are not alone? You have a *paraclete*. Even if you didn't choose one, you have one appointed for you. Even if you didn't choose one, you have one beside you, who loves you more than any other being in heaven or on earth.

You may struggle.

You will slip up, slip away, get restless and rebel, and yet....

You are not alone.

You have a *paraclete*.

Thanks be to God.

Oh! One more thing....

As it turns out, you also have the other *paraclete*. In the Gospel of John, in the last discourse of Jesus, after he has washed the disciple's feet, Jesus says:

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate (paraclete) to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him or knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be with you. I will not leave as orphans; I will come to you....

Jesus, our advocate, promises to send the other advocate, the Holy Spirit. The most common use of *paraclete* in the New Testament is for the Holy Spirit.

You have two *paracletes*, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

You have Jesus offering your case before God. And the Holy Spirit to help you.

You are not alone.

You are not an orphan.

You're covered on both sides.

No matter what the struggle, that seems like good news.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.