

Sermon: Love in Action

Year A, Easter 6

[Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21](#)

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How many of you have tried to get a medical referral recently? Not for yourself, necessarily, but for your kid or your parent. You have *that voice*, right. It's a little lower, it's a little slower. It's conveying inexhaustible patience, you can hang on the line until they do what you want. And there's a little bit of an edge, like you can hang on the line until they do what you want. It's crazy making and frustrating and why should it be so hard to get something taken care of that they clearly need. Especially since it will happen anyway. Let's just cut to the chase.

You're calling someone in to help someone you love. Now it doesn't have to be medical. It can be a reading specialist or a math tutor. It can be a case worker or someone to mow the lawn. If you have teenagers, it can be an aunt or an uncle, because, God knows, the kids don't listen to their parents. It can be one of your brothers or sister, because, God knows, your parents have never listened to you. But you're calling someone in.

In the text today from John, Jesus is saying good-bye to his disciples. After he has washed their feet like a servant, before his crucifixion as a criminal, he speaks of God giving us another Advocate (John 14:16). The word in Greek is *paraklete*. In usage outside the Bible, a *paraklete* was someone who was called in.¹ They could be called in as an expert witness in a trial; they could be called in to argue a case because the accusation was so grave; they could be called in because the situation was so complex you needed expert advice; they could be called in to rally a group of depressed and dispirited soldiers.²

Greek was the language of trade back then, the way English is today. Remember that Alexander the Great had conquered a significant portion of the lands from the Mediterranean to India. By the time the Romans took over what was left of Alexander's empire and then expanded it, they just kept speaking Greek for trade. Indeed, most Jews couldn't really read Hebrew, so the sacred Hebrew texts were translated into a standard Greek version. When you look at how *paraklete* is used in those books, it has a sense of the person who brings the consolation or encouragement that comes with prophesy.³

So an advocate, a *paraklete*, is called in when things are not going according to plan, when you need real talented help. And can't we understand that? Our kids want to sing and we can't carry a tune in a bucket. Math was always cool for us, at least until we got to non-linear, multi-variable calculus, and our kid can't get geometry and we can't help them because it was always so obvious to us. A *paraklete* is someone who is called in. Just because they are called in doesn't mean they can help. The kid has to work with the tutor. The parents have to let the lawn guy do what we asked him to do. But they have to be called in first.

And in the Biblical usage outside the Gospel of John, it is someone who is called in to connect this world to the promises of God. And we can understand that too. We call in people to help us

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*. Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 166-167.

² Barclay, 166-167.

³ Gerard Sloyan, *John*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988), 183.

with our kids who are drifting away from us. We call in people to help us with our parents who are struggling and refusing our help to the extent we are afraid they are diminishing their own lives.

And we could use a good Advocate for our own failings before God, when we fail to set a good example for our kids or offer appropriate, though not blind, obedience to our parents. So thank God Jesus has promised us this other Advocate. Surely we could use that Advocate's help.

But notice this. Jesus said God was sending *another* Advocate (John 14:16). So God sent one before. God sent Jesus. Jesus promises that his presence and the presence of the Advocate will be with those who keep the commandments to love and serve one another. That love is not just a feeling.⁴ We love our kids; we love our parents. That love drives us into action. We grab our patience with both hands and get on the phone with the insurance company. We call total strangers to find a singing coach or a lawn guy because feeling love drives us to do things we frankly might not do for ourselves. What did love drive the first Advocate to do? Wash the feet of his disciples like a slave; set aside his Kingship to die the death of a criminal.⁵

And note who is calling in this *paraklete*. We are not calling in the *paraklete*, the Advocate, to help us with the myriad of challenges we face connecting to God and God's promises. God is calling in the *paraklete* to connect with us.⁶ That is love driving action. God so loves the world that God has sent a part of God's self into this world to help us when we try to do something we're not terribly good at. Sure, we have to accept the help. We have to open ourselves to the help the *paraklete* has been called in to offer. But when we are hanging onto to our patience with our teeth and listening to hold music, when we are calling the third math tutor and hearing either a dragon who clearly hates kids or someone who seems like more of a kid than our own, when we are talking with someone about mowing a lawn who seems to think we want to install the gardens of Versailles, that's when we can remember we are not alone. There is another Advocate who has been called in, for our kids, for our parents, for our very own selves. Because we are surrounded by love in action. Especially when we are struggling to put our own love into action.

⁴ Linda Lee Cladder, "Sixth Sunday of Easter, Homiletical Perspective, John 14:15-21" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 495.

⁵ Cladder, 495.

⁶ Anna Carter Florence, "Sixth Sunday of Easter," in *Preaching Year A with Anna Carter Florence: Reflections on the Gospel Readings (2016-2017) Revised Common Lectionary*. (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, 2016), 66.