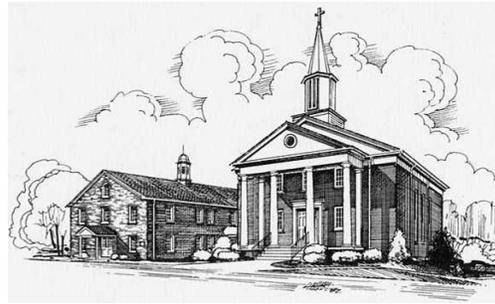


**The Lessons Appoint-
ed for Use on the
Sixth Sunday of Easter**



Year A
RCL

Acts 17:22-31
Psalm 66:7-18
John 14:15-21

The Collect

The Collect

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you

and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen

Acts 17:22-31

Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and per-

haps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we too are his offspring.’

Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Psalm 66:7-18

Jubilate Deo

- 7 Bless our God, you peoples; *
make the voice of his praise to be heard;
- 8 Who holds our souls in life, *
and will not allow our feet to slip.
- 9 For you, O God, have proved us; *
you have tried us just as silver is tried.
- 10 You brought us into the snare; *
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.
- 11 You let enemies ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water; *
but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.
- 12 I will enter your house with burnt-offerings
and will pay you my vows, *
which I promised with my lips
and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.
- 13 I will offer you sacrifices of fat beasts
with the smoke of rams; *
I will give you oxen and goats.
- 14 Come and listen, all you who fear God, *
and I will tell you what he has done for me.
- 15 I called out to him with my mouth, *

and his praise was on my tongue.

16 If I had found evil in my heart, *
the Lord would not have heard me;

17 But in truth God has heard me; *
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

18 Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, *
nor withheld his love from me.

John 14:15-21

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 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.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.”

SERMON

We're continuing this Sunday with Jesus' Farewell Discourse – His last instruction to His disciples before the Crucifixion. Jesus is preparing His disciples to carry on the work and we get to be there and share this time with Jesus and the disciples. We must listen carefully because Jesus is speaking to us as well.

Listening to Jesus means understanding not only the content – what Jesus said – but the context within which He spoke as well, because content without context is pretext. Consider Psalm 137, the beautiful grieving Psalm of a people exiled from their home to Babylon that begins

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
6 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem

above my highest joy.

That is the context in which it was written – a people forced from their home to live as prisoners in a foreign land, so, knowing that, perhaps the closing verses are understandable.

O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

Reading this Psalm without knowing its context of deep mourning might lead you to believe that God blesses infanticide. Unless you are careful to familiarize yourself with the historical and cultural context within which Jesus spoke, you are almost certain to misunderstand and your relationship will be pretext.

It's not hard to misunderstand. Jesus was speaking Aramaic, John is writing in Greek, and we're reading in

English. Each of these languages was born in a particular time and culture and carries the understandings of that time and culture. Those cultural assumptions are the context within which Jesus spoke. Without that context, you are wandering in the wilderness. Think of two workmen trying to nail boards together. One is holding the nail, the other the hammer. The one holding the nail says, “When I nod my head, you hit it”. Can you see room for confusion there? Or imagine a translator two thousand years from now attempting to understand a document from our time which includes phrases like “made from scratch”, or “wild card”, or “slid into home”. Someone who does not share our culture would likely be misled. We need to take care not to read the Gospels assuming that they were written expressly for consumption by Twenty-first century readers. They were not. They contain the wisdom of God, but we are

very likely to miss the message unless we pay attention to the context within which they spoke.

Unfortunately, being the hard-headed students that we are, we very often don't do the work necessary to understand Jesus' words, preferring instead the thoughts we brought with us. In other words, we read Scripture to find a passage that supports a position we had to begin with rather than allowing Scripture to form our ideas. That's why I say that content without context is pretext. Reading in that way is called Eisegesis. Eisegesis is what's being done when someone looks to the Bible for support for notions that were born outside of the Bible. In eisegesis, we read stuff into Scripture. For instance, the idea of the United States as a "Christian Nation" is the creation of egos who gloat over being powerful. It has no basis in history or fact, but more important, it has no basis in the Bible. Thus it arises from

eisegesis. Its opposite, exegesis, is allowing Scripture to form our ideas, far the more appropriate approach to Scripture.

Looking to our passage from John, we read the word “Commandments”. What’s the first word to pop into your mind? Right. “Ten”. Everybody knows there are ten commandments. That’s the notion you brought with you. What if I told you that Maimonides identified 613 commandments in Torah? When Jesus tells us

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

his meaning is likely to get confused with thoughts of the Ten Commandments and from that to a slavish adherence to the words of the Decalogue as if that were all there is to being a Christian.

When Jesus speaks of His commandments, he is speaking of the totality of His teachings during His time

with His Disciples and of the task before them after His death. Jesus is telling them that faithfulness to His teaching is the mark of belonging to Him. The works the disciples will do are those that spring from one's love of God and Jesus, and as such continue the love that is at the heart of Jesus' own words, the purpose of which is always to make known the power and character of God. The Apostles are to share in the revealing of God to the world. That is your job as well.

“Job? I have a job? I was always told that all I had to do was not steal or fool around with somebody else's wife, go to church and I got to go to heaven when I die. Nobody said anything about a job!” That's what I mean about confronting the world eisegetically. Left to our own devices we will either hear too little of Jesus' teaching, like some who cling to an uninformed literal reading of the Bible (sometimes even a particular trans-

lation of it) or we'll come to the conclusion that everything that comes into our heads represents God's voice.

There should be a middle course, and there is.

To some extent, eisegesis is unavoidable. We don't come to the Bible with a blank slate. A lot of living and learning went into each of us. If we really bring our whole selves to the study of the Bible, all that stuff in us will and should have an impact on how we learn from the Bible. Here's where prayerful obedience and discipline come in, for the Spirit rewards hard work and harder prayer. The hard work of exegesis uncovers what the Bible is telling us, and our obedience sets aside the ideas we cherish so that we may take on the Bible's vision. The same living and learning that would have driven us to do an eisegesis of the text, instead becomes the raw material for re-visioning our lives and thoughts . . . in the light of what the Spirit reveals in Scripture (exegesis).¹

Our experience in the world in which we live is the

¹ http://www.spirithome.com/bible_exegesis.html

raw material for re-visioning our lives and thoughts. That's wonderful, but how are we to avoid reading our own thoughts and prejudices into the text eisegetically, thus reinforcing them by imputing divine approval on our own thoughts, and spreading confusion among our brothers and sisters?

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 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. I will not leave you orphaned

The Greek word translated "Advocate" is, in Greek, Parakletos, a much more expressive word. In a really interesting interpretation in "New Testament Studies" a peer-reviewed journal published by Cambridge University Press, the Advocate is described in this way:

The Paraclete represents the Spirit as manifested in a particular way, as a pneumatic

Christian speech charisma. Every verb describing the ministry of the Paraclete is directly related to his speech function.”²

What a lot of words! And what do they mean? They mean that the Holy Spirit will be in you and you in the Holy Spirit guiding your words, and that the world will hear through your words.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.

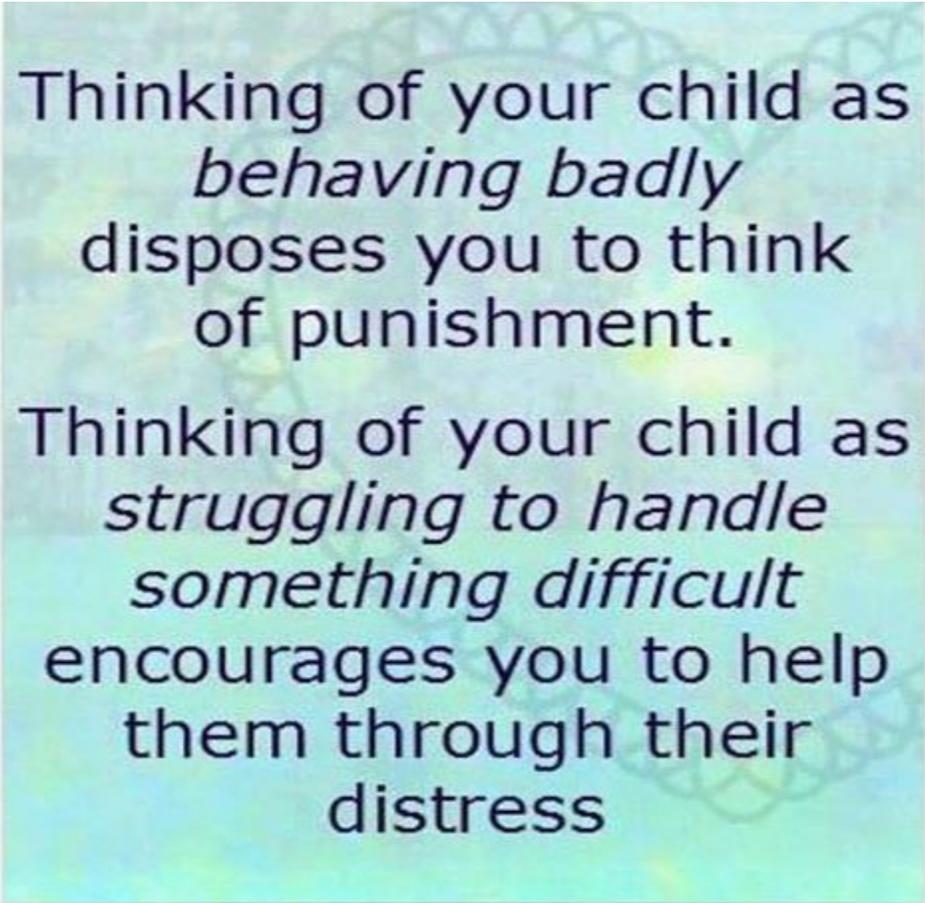
The Advocate is a pneumatic charisma. To belong to Jesus is to speak His word into the world. The indwelling Holy Spirit will speak to the contemporary world through you. This is the joy and the responsibility of being Christian – Jesus loves you, and lives WITHIN

² The Influence of Christian Prophecy on the Johannine Portrayal of the Paraclete and Jesus". *New Testament Studies*. Cambridge University Press. 25 (01): 113–123. October 1978. Retrieved 27 May 2016.

you. This is also the work of being a Christian – to assure that the words you speak reflect the presence of the Advocate within you. Like those original disciples, you are to share in the revealing of God to the world.

Amen

BENEDICTION



Thinking of your child as
behaving badly
disposes you to think
of punishment.

Thinking of your child as
struggling to handle
something difficult
encourages you to help
them through their
distress

Remember that the person who disrespects and an-

noys you is God's child who may be struggling with something difficult. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to him through you.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2017 J. Stewart Schneider

From The Lectionary Page: <http://lectionarypage.net>