A sermon for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine preached by the Bishop, the Right Reverend Thomas James Brown, on the 6th Sunday of Easter, 17 May 2020.

Another Advocate

Barbara Lundblad, whom some of you know as one of the great preachers of our day, speaks about the importance of remaining open to the winds of the Spirit because welcomed—or not welcomed—we shall be changed. Indeed, before our very eyes we are experiencing not only disorientation, but also transformation.

Today's gospel might be a roadmap for this time in our lives that is as unsettling and disorienting as most of us have known. Jesus and his followers are together—it's the night before his crucifixion—and he's preparing them for a time when he won't be with them. They're distressed and scared. So are we. A pandemic threatens everything, and we do not know where the road leads. Any sense of safety and security is out the window.

Into that moment with Jesus and his disciples, and most assuredly into our moment right now, Jesus says that he will not leave us orphaned or alone. What he says is that he'll send another Advocate.

In coming alongside each other, in all the ways you're caring for the people of Maine, let's think of ourselves as signs of the very Advocate about which Jesus was speaking. In the Diocese of Maine we speak about our capacity to build and to nurture relationships. Today Jesus, the first advocate, sends another advocate so that our relationships in God and with each other flourish.

Can you feel Jesus leading us onward… from fear to trust; confusion to understanding; anger to peace, death to life? Let Christ come alongside, giving you the Comforter, sanctifying you in truth, and equipping you to join him and the Spirit to restore the world. Whatever restoring the world will look like is beyond our seeing, at least right now. But restoration shall reveal the presence of the risen Christ, and that presence has the power to change the direction of our lives, and I believe, the very direction of the world. Jesus Christ is alive, coming to you and me in ways as jolting as it all was for Thomas who thought touching the wounds was necessary, but in fact didn't. Instead his profession of faith occurred the moment Jesus said, "put your finger here and see my hands." Friends: Jesus Christ is alive right now, revealing himself to us the way he did to travelers on Emmaus Road. Jesus Christ is alive as the Good Shepherd, leading us into unknown pastures yet guarding us with his love and wisdom. Jesus Christ is alive sending—right now—another Advocate.

And that Advocate is the power of love, a word Jesus says a thousand different ways: if you love me you will keep my commandments; a new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you; whoever does not love me does not keep my words; I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. The Spirit of love that dwells in him dwells in us.

We don't know what that future is going to be, but we know we are being transformed and changed. As we welcome the Advocate, the one Jesus is sending yet again to make us agents of new life see if one of these promises from scripture might be a talisman to go along with the roadmap of today's gospel:

- Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. *(1 Peter 3:14-16)*

- And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,.*(Romans 5:3-4)*

- We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. *(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)*

- We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose. *(Romans 8:28)*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen.