

## **God Is with Us**

John 14:15-21

It is a joy to share God's word with you  
on behalf of our clergy community in Wisconsin.  
I have been blessed to serve among all of you  
and humbled to carry on with the servant leadership journey.

Since we've been asked to "Stay Safe at Home" because of COVID 19  
our clergy leaders, like each of you, have been under stress.  
They have quickly learned how to provide online worship.  
They have struggled to do pastoral care  
while maintaining appropriate social distance.  
This has not been easy.  
I praise God for their leadership.

This has also been a time when lay leadership has stepped up  
to help congregations to be connected through the internet.  
I praise God for your leadership as well.

May is a month when many cultures celebrate family.  
In this country those who have mothered us are honored.  
I love May because of such strong spirit  
of gratitude and loving siblings.  
I also love May since it was in this month  
that John Wesley had a life changing experience at Aldersgate.  
There while listening to Luther's Preface to Romans  
he suddenly realized that he was loved by God just as he was.  
With that love in his heart,  
Wesley formed the community of holiness  
that came to be called Methodist.

We are Wesley's heirs, continuing to live in the spirit.  
God was with him.  
God is with us.

I came to experience that love when I was sixteen.  
I grew up on an island in the north east corner of South Korea.

It's on the Yellow Sea to the east of China  
and next to the North Korean border.  
It's known as Kangwha-do.  
It's a small, historic Island  
which has been the steppingstone  
in many international conflicts.  
As a child I became painfully aware of conflicts of its past  
when I was playing with a friend on a beach.  
The object he picked up was a mine that exploded  
and immediately took his life.

Historic conflict is one aspect of life on Kangwha.  
The other is the presence of Methodism  
that was first brought there by an American missionary.  
It was through conversations with a Methodist pastor  
that I came and many others came to follow Jesus.

The entire population of the island is some 68,000.  
There are four districts of the Korean Methodist church  
and 140 congregations.  
Jesus has led them through many difficult times.  
It was there that I learned  
that I should be connected to God daily  
and live with liberty, dignity, justice and humility.

I

Says Jesus in John's Gospel, 14:15-16, as translated by Peterson:

“If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you.

I will talk to the Father.

He will provide you another Friend

so that you will always have someone with you.

This Friend is the Spirit of Truth.”

I am so grateful for this promise of Jesus.

God IS with us.

Christ was crucified, died and was resurrected for you and me.

Jesus was rejected by his world,

but through his mystical presence and redeeming love  
we have become Easter people.  
COVID 19 strikes fear.  
It has killed some we loved.  
It has caused us to socially separate ourselves.  
This separation has become a true test and trial of our faith.  
The longer it continues, the harder it may become  
to accept our current reality with grace.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”  
To Jesus those commandments are loving God  
and loving our neighbor.

The Spirit is present with us.  
Listen carefully. You will hear the spirit say,  
“You are loved, accepted and forgiven.  
You belong to me.”

I ask you – be in silence  
and in that silence listen for the voice of the Spirit.

II

Listen again to Jesus in John, vs. 18-19

“I will not leave you orphaned. I’m coming back.  
In just a little while the world will no longer see me,  
but you’re going to see me because I am alive  
and you’re about to come alive.”

Because of the Spirit, even in quarantine  
we are close in spirit, in mutual care and in prayer.  
I frequently experience being close while physically apart  
in my relationship with my spouse Im.  
She often travels to far parts of the world,  
but we remain close in our loving relationship.  
This has taught me that it is possible  
to be humanly close while physically far apart.

This is what we are all learning in these times:  
To be close in our relationships though physically apart.

As Christians, the Spirit within each of us  
allows for a closeness otherwise out of reach.  
It unites us.  
It blesses us.

Blessed assurance Jesus is mine.  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long,  
This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long.”

We are invited in these difficult times  
to focus with greater intentionality  
on our life in the spirit with God.  
Siblings in Christ, I commend you  
to seek spiritual depth in these challenging times.  
God knows you better than you know yourself.

III

Again listen to Jesus (v. 20).

At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and  
you're in me, and I'm in you.

It is this – the Spirit sent by God – that unities us as Christians.  
It is not anything we do that unites us.  
It is not believing the same things that unites us.  
It is the presence of God that Jesus promised  
that makes us one in Christ.

In other words, Christian unity is not a thing we create  
but a gift of God to us as the spirit dwells within us.

Serving among you beautiful people in Wisconsin  
I am ever more convinced that unity is God's purpose  
even when we have strong disagreements  
as to where we believe God is leading us.  
I continue searching in these days for where  
we are being led by God.  
In some ways COVID 19 has made the search more difficult,  
in other ways it has opened us to see new possibilities.

I am imagining that United Methodists in Wisconsin  
will be led to live and practice the gospel  
on every day and in every place,  
not just Sundays in buildings reserved for that purpose.

I am imagining that we be led to become eco-friendly  
caring for God's earth as God has asked us to do.

I am imagining that we will become a people who understand  
that our individual welfare is inseparable  
from the welfare of the world.

I am imagining that we will be led to review critically how we live,  
what we consume,  
and what we claim "to own"  
in a world that belongs - not us - but to God.

There are many things to discern  
is learning how God is leading us,  
but of one thing I am sure:  
As followers of Jesus, God is not leading us  
to go off in separate ways because we sometime disagree.  
What God has brought together  
no human shall tear apart.

We are One in The Spirit,  
We are One in The Lord.  
We are One in The Spirit,  
We are One in The Lord.  
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love,  
By our Love,  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.  
They'll know we are Christians by our love.  
Amen.