

**SERMON TITLE:** “The Love That Guides”  
**TEXT:** John 14:15-21  
**PREACHED AT:** Neighbourhood Church  
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We find ourselves kind of between sermon series... We have finished our brief walk through parts of John’s gospel that we began before Easter, and which has focused on the centrality of choice in the Christian life.

We were encouraged to choose:

- Life
- Jesus
- Forgiveness
- Resurrection
- Belief
- To See
- To Work

These themes have been good and important to look at. I think that the importance of *choosing* to follow Jesus is deeply ingrained in our Anabaptist DNA, and it is important to focus on *our* role in growing in faith and hope and love as we follow Jesus.

But, as we all know, it’s not easy to choose well. All of us—even those of us who have been walking with Jesus for years—choose poorly, at times.

We choose things that are not life-giving.

We choose Jesus, but mostly on *our* terms, not his.

We choose to forgive... except when it’s hard. Which is almost always.

We choose to believe, but we are plagued by doubts and fears and insecurities (not unlike some of Jesus’ first disciples).

We choose to work in the kingdom of God, but we are easily distracted and under-motivated.

It is important to choose well, but we are not always good choosers. At least not on our own.

So, today, I thought it would be good to be reminded that there is something else at work in the world besides our choices, important as these are.

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Last week Travis played a song during his sermon that talked about the challenge of evil and suffering and how it's hard to believe in a God who allows things like poverty and violence.

It was a very good way into the topic that Travis was addressing which had to do with the name of God, and making sure we are not worshiping a God who we have made in our own image!

I think that looking at various forms of art—including music—is a good way of taking the “spiritual temperature” of a culture. The songs that a culture produces, give us a window into what people around us are thinking and feeling, what they hope for or what they don't hope for.

So this week, I'm going to play a clip from a song by David Gray called “Ain't No Love.” As you listen, I want you to think about what this song tells us about our spiritual temperature as a culture.

PLAY “AIN'T NO LOVE”

What did you notice about the song?

- Boredom?
- Unfulfilled dreams?
- Despair?
- Doubt/unbelief
- Loneliness?
- Longing (ecstasy)?

Every time I listen to this song I am struck by the stark contrast between the haunting beauty of the music and the message of the song.

But I think it captures where many people are at in our culture. There is this deep hunger for and appreciation of beauty, but there is a sense of despair and hopelessness that the things we most want are out of our grasp.

There is a kind of resigned acceptance that we're on our own here. There's no one out there to help us.

We are orphans.

This is how many people see the fate of humanity in the modern world.

Modern science has given us a picture of just how enormous the universe is and how microscopic we are in comparison. We are just one tiny little creature on one tiny little planet in the middle of this vast uninhabitable galaxy.

One lonely little orphan species in the middle of an impersonal, uncaring, harsh cosmos that began from nothing and will return to nothing at some point in the unfathomable future.

Perhaps you are thinking that this is a non-Christian phenomenon... “Well, of course you would feel that way if you didn’t believe in God, right?”

But I don’t think that these feelings are unique to nonbelievers. Christians suffer from depression at roughly the same level as non-Christians. Christians feel lonely and afraid, too. Christians experience sadness and pain and confusion, and unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

And even healthy Christians go through periods where it just seems like we’re on our own here, like God is absent or silent or busy or *something*...

We are small little creatures in a big world, like little blades of grass who flourish for a while, then are gone, blown away by the wind and remembered no more (Psalm 103:14-16).

It’s easy to feel like an orphan.

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Well, believe it or not, we’re not the first people to feel this way!

This experience of feeling orphaned in the universe is not unique to modern times, nor is it purely the one of the results of our modern scientific view of the world.

Seeing as how we’ve spent so much time in the Gospel of John over the last few months, I thought I would return there this morning.

We’re picking up the story today at the beginning of what biblical scholars call the “farewell discourses” of Jesus.

As you may know, half of John’s gospel is devoted to the last week of Jesus’ life, and a full four chapters (13-17) contains Jesus final words to his disciples before leaving them.

The disciples are confused, a little frightened, unsure of what is going to take place, not entirely sure what Jesus is talking about with strange words about “the Son of Man being glorified” and saying that they have seen the Father because they have seen him, and being able to do even greater works than his...

They are probably a little worried about what is going to become of them if Jesus ends up getting in trouble, they are probably feeling like small fish in a big pond, at the mercy of big and powerful forces beyond their control...

Probably feeling a bit like orphans.

And in this context, in the middle of this long final discourse, Jesus says these words to his disciples.

READ JOHN 14:15-21

And Jesus knew that his disciples would have times where they felt like orphans. He knew that they would face difficult times after he was gone.

I did a kind of mental checklist of what these disciples would face, later in life, after Jesus was no longer with them bodily.

Persecution, suffering, marginalization, ridicule, contempt, and, in many cases, death.

Jesus knew that his disciples wouldn't always find it natural or easy to choose well or live with courage and hope.

He knew that they needed help from the outside. He knew that the only way that we would be able to keep his commands, and love one another as we were made to do, would be if we were filled with his presence and energy and love.

And in this passage, Jesus promises that he will not leave his followers as orphans. He promises that the Holy Spirit will come and infuse them with what they need to do his work while he is gone.

These are amazing words.

The word used in the text is "advocate." Some translations say "helper," some say "comforter."

What does an advocate do? What is Jesus promising in this passage?

1. Comforter/Helper
  - a. e.g. of Claire and Nicholas when Nicky got stitches on Thursday night
  - b. Having someone to walk with you through pain helps, even though nothing changes in our external circumstances!
  - c. God is *with us*. We are not orphans in the cosmos, left on our own...
  - d. The image is of a **friend** who walks with us, stands behind us, cheers us on!
2. Advocate
  - a. Stands up in court and explains things from the accused's point of view
  - b. An advocate pleads the case

- c. Jesus undoubtedly knew that his followers would find themselves in some tricky situations over time, places where they would be forced to speak the truth to powerful people; the Holy Spirit would defend them
  - i. We see an example of this in Luke 12:10-12—“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, <sup>12</sup> for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”
- d. The image is of a **defender** who stands up for us in a world where we are under threat

The combined picture is a very good and reassuring one.

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Well, it's one thing to hear about the reality of the Holy Spirit, to hear that we are not left as orphans... it's another to **experience** it.

Most of us *already* believe that the Holy Spirit is within us, after all. But what difference does the Spirit of Truth make in our every day lives?

Well, on Monday, I had an experience that helped me understand this a bit better.

As you may be able to tell from the still pinkish hue of my head, on Monday I went surfing in Tofino. Well, I'm not sure you could actually call it surfing, but I was *in* the ocean *with* a surfboard, paddling around like crazy, drinking gallons of saltwater, and thrashing around helplessly, etc, etc.

Mike Fast, one of the young adults, had the misfortune of being my tutor for the day, and he would stop me periodically throughout the day to analyze what I was or, more often, was not doing, and to give me some pointers on how to get up.

At one point in the day, I was making minimal progress in at least picking the right waves and being pointed in the right direction when they crested, but I was still not able to get up.

“You're trying to stand up too soon,” Mike said. “You need to wait until you feel the wave start to move you, and *then* try to get up.”

“Right. Wait for the wave. Got it.”

Over the next few attempts, I was able to make some genuine progress. I waited longer. I waited until I felt like the wave was on nearly on top of me, and then tried to stand. A couple of times, I actually made it!

Of course, I wasn't up for long, but even surfing for 5 seconds is exhilarating!

I just needed to wait for the wave.

As we were driving home, it occurred to me that there are some similarities between my experience on the surfboard and life with the Spirit.

In both cases, our job is to participate in what is *already* happening, to align our actions with a force and a momentum that is already at work, already in motion.

In neither case will it do any good to just do whatever we want. Just like I had to respect how the ocean works, we have to respect how the Holy Spirit works.

(Of course, all metaphors break down at some point... The Holy Spirit is personal, and the ocean is anything but ☺.)

In both cases, we are to wait. Until the wave moves. Until God moves.

**And then make sure you're going facing the right direction!**

And what is that direction? Well, according to Jesus in this passage, love is the direction. We do what he commands. And what does he command?

Just a few verses earlier, Jesus says these words:

“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

How does Jesus love? Well, at the beginning of the meal in which Jesus says these words, he washed his disciples feet.

We love selflessly. Sacrificially. Humbly. Putting the needs of others ahead of our own, being willing to be persecuted for the sake of our brothers and sisters, forgiving freely. Seeking the best for others. Even those we find it difficult to get along with!

We keep doing this, over and over again, we keep facing the direction of love, and eventually... We stand up. We recognize the Spirit's movement in our lives. We see how our actions and our words are increasingly fitting with the life and character of Jesus.

We *experience* the comfort of our defender, our cheerleader, our advocate.

We experience the truth that we are not orphans because God shows himself to us in the process of our following.

John 14:21:

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. Anyone who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

Like everything else worth having or experiencing, living in step with the Spirit takes practice!!

Like everything else in the Christian life, we act and trust our way into experiencing the gifts of God.

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The song I played earlier claimed that there was no love that was guiding him, that it was “just a lie” that there was a God of love out there in the starry firmament.

Our passage this morning tells us a different story. Our passage this morning urges us to love as Jesus loves—to always be facing the right direction.

It urges us to take heart because the Spirit of Truth is within us in the process, shaping and molding us, comforting us, encouraging us, cheering us on as we pursue righteousness, standing up for us, presenting us before the throne of judgment as spotless and pure and innocent.

I **will not** leave you as orphans.

I don't know where you are at this morning. Perhaps you are feeling close to God, you are walking with the Spirit with joy and enthusiasm and peace. Perhaps you are feeling like the world is a source of wonder, delight, and security.

If so, praise God! Jesus promise of the Advocate to comfort and defend are a experiential reality to be claimed on an ongoing basis!

But perhaps there are others here who struggle with times of feeling a bit like an orphan. Like there is no one to protect you, like there is no one to comfort you, to cheer you on.... Like you are alone and afraid, and uncertain... Like life is throwing more at you than you can possibly handle.

If so, Jesus' words are a lifeline for you today. The world can be scary, it can be confusing, it can be disorienting and painful, and frustrating... But the Holy Spirit of Truth is here.

Just like the waves that ceaselessly roll toward the shores, the Spirit is always at work.

Our job is to recognize this, to acknowledge it, but also to be facing in the right direction, and moving with the Spirit in our every day lives.

If we are sensitive to the Spirit's presence, if we are honestly and openly living lives of love and trust before God, the comfort of God will be with us, and we will know, deep in our bones, that we are not orphans, that there *is* a God out there who has given us life and love to guide us.

Thanks be to God.