

Sermon
The Sixth Sunday After Easter
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [ACTS 17:22-31](#); [PSALM 66:7-18](#); [1 PETER 3:13-22](#);
[JOHN 14:15-21](#)

Endings and beginnings: life is full of them, isn't it? Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön says this:

"If we want to find any semblance of peace, we need to face the truth: life comes together and then falls apart. This coming together and falling apart is a never-ending cycle in human existence."

Endings and beginnings. Coming together and falling apart.

Our Gospel passage today has us continue in what is referred to as the "Farewell Discourse" in John's Gospel. As Linda reminded us last week, these chapters bring us Jesus, with the disciples on the night before his death, having shared a last meal with them, offering them words to comfort, to strengthen, to equip and to prepare them for the chaos that is to come.

Life has come together for Jesus and the disciples: their lives have come together as the disciples have followed Jesus, as they have walked with him in his earthly ministry. They have

been alongside him in his preaching, teaching and healing. But life will fall apart in the days ahead. There will be an ending – a brutal and painful ending – as Jesus is crucified. And there will be a beginning, too! There will be a coming together in a way that makes all things new in the Resurrection.

Jesus is preparing the disciples for life as they have known it together to fall apart. He is preparing them for an ending, knowing and reassuring them that there is also a beginning.

How is it that Jesus prepares them for this falling apart and coming together? For this ending and beginning? There is living word in this for us today: how can we be prepared – how can we find comfort and strength – for the coming together and falling apart in our lives? For the endings and beginnings that are part of our human existence?

How does Jesus do this preparing for the coming together and falling apart, for the endings and beginnings? He does it with *love*.

I wonder if you know Roger Whittaker's song "The Last Farewell"?

The words of the chorus are this:

"For you are beautiful. And I have loved you dearly, more dearly than the spoken word can tell."

As Jesus spends this time with the disciples, he is bidding them a "last farewell". In this time spent sharing a meal in the upper room Jesus is letting the disciples know that they are beautiful. He is telling them that he has loved them dearly.

The message "You are beautiful" and "I have loved you dearly..." is not just for the disciples: it's for us, too.

This is the first mention of "the Advocate" in John's Gospel. An Advocate – a helper, a friend, someone alongside to comfort and support. Notice that Jesus says "I will send *another* Advocate" Jesus has been an Advocate – a helper, someone alongside – with the disciples. He has loved them, and they have loved him.

It's love that carries us through endings and beginnings, through coming together and falling apart. It's love that creates

space for all the things that are part of endings and beginnings, all the things that are part of coming together and falling apart.

Jesus loved the disciples, and he loves us. He sent another Advocate to be alongside the disciples, and that same Advocate is with us. That same Advocate is alongside us in all our endings and all our beginnings, in all the falling part and coming together. We've got very mystical language that is typical of John's Gospel in our Gospel passage this morning:

"...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."

This is an invitation into relationship with as our Collect has us pray this morning "A three-fold God of love". It's an invitation into a loving relationship that is moving, shifting, adjusting, and in that moving, creates a space that is infused with love.

Endings and beginnings and coming together and falling apart need *space*. The Advocate – Spirit, Helper, Guide – is God

with us, loving us, moving in us to make space in our hearts and souls and minds to navigate, and indeed to flourish in life.

Our first reading this morning, which brings us Paul, preaching in Athens. This is an amazing example of *spaciousness*. Paul might have followed patterns of Stephen and Peter, who, in their preaching early in Acts, described the history of Israel and argued for the place of Jesus in it as the culmination of God's plan of grace. But that is not what Paul does.

The court of the Areopagus was all about reason and rhetoric. Paul engages with them with style and language that would have been familiar to them. He quotes an Athenian poet instead of the Torah. He uses an example of something he saw in one of their temples to critique the limits of idols. He invites them into divine mystery saying to them: I'm here to tell you about that "unknown God" you refer to. He says to them: in spite of your intelligence and learning there is still much to be learned.

This is about space. It's about coming alongside in a way that makes space for a coming together and a falling apart in a

shifting perspective. It's a way that makes space for an ending and a beginning in a new way of seeing things.

In his book *"The Church of Us vs. Them: Freedom from a Faith That Feeds on Making Enemies"*, David Fitch says this:

"The gospel comes like a fragrance, a nonviolent, pungent reality that one either receives with embrace or turns away from in repulsion. The aroma is zesty. It may provoke reaction. But in itself it is nonviolent. It just is. It does not make enemies, but it surely exposes enemies. It reveals what is already happening—life or death—and invites people to join in the procession."

Frederic Beuchner says this:

"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."

This is the way that Jesus invited the disciples to live, and it's the way we are invited to live. The gospel does reveal what is

already happening – life or death, ending or beginning, coming together or falling apart – and we are invited to join in, with love. God is with us in all of life, all our moments, loving us. We are invited to let that love create a spaciousness in our hearts and souls and minds so that we can embrace and flourish in all the endings and beginnings, all the coming together and falling apart that is life, in Jesus name. Amen.