

PILGRIM

C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

You Don't Have to Do it By Yourself

John 14: 23 – 29 May 9, 2010

Pilgrim Church Bud Precise

Don't be anxious. It will be all right. I will be with you. We read these accounts of the disciples – their failure to understand Jesus – and we think – well, “They just don't get it.” Be careful with that judgment. We may be judging ourselves. Jesus repeatedly says to us, “Don't put your trust in riches -- don't heap up treasure here on earth.” What do we do? We spend our time and energy working – trying to accumulate enough stuff so we can buy eternity for ourselves. Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek when struck. But we strike back hard enough to knock down the purse thief, the aggressor, taze the loose fan on a baseball field. Jesus tells us to take up the cross and follow. But mostly, religion has become a cushion rather than a cross. Religion serves to soften the blows of life, comfort in the midst of storm; it's something to make life go easier. The cross – well, that symbol of commitment for Jesus makes us uncomfortable at times. Jesus speaks strange words about peace, about love, about glory that has the shape of a cross. I don't know that we get it any better than these early disciples did.

Yet, here in our text for today, Jesus promises these disciples an “advocate.” Jesus is leaving them, but he assures them that this is not the end. He will continue to be with them, to teach them. He will be with them. Just as they think the door between them and Jesus is about to be shut, Jesus is opening another door for them.

To these disciples - to us – who do not give Jesus proper understanding – to these faithful disciples, Jesus calls for courageous obedience. Jesus gives an advocate. One of the things this advocate does is to teach us. This advocate present with us is the Spirit of God, the very power of God.

Jesus knows the Christian life is not to be lived alone. We are not to try to understand the Bible, to have a community of faith, to take up the cross, to witness for Christ, to live out the Christian life alone. If you could remember your baptism, you would remember the community of faith prayed for the Holy Spirit to be in your life. That Spirit, given to you by God, is to teach, guide, strengthen and equip you to be a faithful disciple. The church never expects you to do it by yourself.

David, age 7, wanted to play soccer. We signed him up and I also volunteered to help the coach. I made it clear that I would put out balls, cones, whatever the coach needed done. I

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knew nothing about soccer. Well, twenty minutes into the first practice, coach had to leave for something (he worked for the Park and Recreation Board), so I thought he would be right back. He didn't come back. Another Park Board employee told me I would have to be coach. Really!! I bought this book, "HOW TO COACH AND PLAY SOCCER." I tell you the truth, that book became my bible for that spring as far as soccer was concerned.

Some people think the Bible is that sort of thing for us in the church. "Here is life's little book of instruction." I don't think that is what Jesus is telling us in this passage today. Jesus doesn't say, "I am leaving you a book of instruction." What Jesus does say is "I am leaving you a guide, a friend, a teacher -- an Advocate." Jesus doesn't expect us to be faithful by ourselves. We don't have to do it by ourselves.

In the late 80's and into the 90's, I taught a sex education course for the United Methodist Church. It was an excellent course -- well designed, thoughtfully involving students and parents. The students were 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th, grade students. For a student to participate in the course, a parent had to attend the parent sessions.

The course was perfect in that it addressed a need in the lives of the young people and their parents at a time when they knew they needed the help. While the parents would have liked for us to teach the kids the right responses to situations (right being the position of the parents!), we had a session on decision making. What are factors in a decision? What is a decision? How do we make it? One line I remember that to me was the most important information we gave them. "While you need to make decisions for yourself, you don't have to make them by yourself." That is hard for a middle school student trying to become independent. But it is a valuable lesson about all of life. There is no "self-made" man/woman" And we all know that. We have this advocate to help us as we decide issues about discipleship. We have this community of faith as we live out discipleship. We have this great cloud of witnesses present with us. Being Christian is not something we must do by ourselves. Thanks be to God