“An Anchor for the Soul”

John 14:15-21, 25-27, Colossians 1:9-14

November 13, 2016, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

When I was kid we spent much of the summer at our cottage in northern Michigan. When I was old enough to be trusted with the boat and the 3HP Green Johnson outboard motor my buddy and I went fishing almost every night until it was pitch black. Now our lake wasn’t every big, only about a mile across, but I still remember heading home and feeling safe when I picked out the distinctive lights of our little cottage. Recently I heard someone talk about fishing on Lake Erie. They also went out to fish at night, but on Lake Erie they went out two or three miles, far enough to almost lose sight of land. There were also currents to deal with, and, since it was many years ago, no GPS. All navigation was by sight. As a result he said the most important piece of gear he had was the anchor. The anchor allowed him to feel confident that he knew where he was and which direction home was, because on Lake Erie, if you were out far enough and you got turned around in the dark, you could head for the wrong country.

This fall we have been looking at six passages from the Bible, three from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament. Together these six passages have been telling us a magnificent story. It goes something like this. From the day we gave in to temptation in Eden, and sin and death entered the world, God has been working to save us, to rescue us. He sent Jesus to die on the cross and rise again. He sent Jesus to take away our sins and give us eternal life.

And yet, as wonderful as all this is, there is still something we need. We need a way to draw near to Jesus, we need a way to choose Him above everything else, and to hold on to Him in the face of everything life throws at us. How do we hold on to Jesus and to His blessings in a world that is so broken and full of all kinds of distractions, dead ends, and false gods?

We need an anchor. We need something to bind us to this truth, to make it real, and to give us the strength to hold on to it. We need an anchor. But not just any anchor. *We need an anchor that is as deeply rooted in God as it is in us. We need an anchor that is securely fastened at both ends*, *in our heart and in God.*

Does such an anchor exist? Is there something that is as deeply rooted in God as it is in us? Yes, Jesus tells us there is. But it’s not a what; it’s a Who. It’s not something; it’s Someone. *The Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit is our anchor. Only the Holy Spirit is as deeply rooted, fixed, and secured in God as it is in us. Only the Holy Spirit is securely fastened at both ends. Only the Holy Spirit binds our heart to God and God’s heart to us. The Holy Spirit makes the rescue real.

Come with me to John chapter 14. It’s the last night of Jesus’ life. He has one more opportunity to speak to His disciples before the terrible events that are to come. He knows that the next few hours and days will be the most desperate hours of their lives. He even warns them that they will all fall away. And He knows that even after the resurrection they will not be able to survive on their own; they will need all the Spirit’s power to share His message with a world that will resist them at every turn. The world hasn’t changed. It still challenges our faith and trust in Jesus every day. So I want to invite you too hear what Jesus as to tell us about the Spirit. Listen to His words. Listen to how Jesus offers the Spirit to His disciples. Where do you need to hear these same words in your heart today?

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.” Jesus calls the Spirit our advocate. This word is also often translated “comforter,” or “helper.” It literally means “one who pleads another’s cause” or “one who comes alongside.” The Holy Spirit is how God declares to us that He is on our side; He is for us. And don’t miss that little word *forever*. The Spirit is always with us. The anchor holds.

Furthermore the Holy Spirit is with us in the most personal way imaginable. In the very next verse Jesus says, “The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” He doubles down on this in the next verse. **“**I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” The Holy Spirit is not an idea, not a thought, not a philosophy or a compelling argument; He is the living presence of God and Jesus in us, in our heart and mind. As our anchor He alone is as deeply rooted in God as He is in us, because He is God, God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the anchor that is fastened securely on both ends.

What will the Spirit do in us? Jesus says He will teach us “all things” and remind us of “everything” Jesus has said to us. And finally, because of this, because of who the Spirit is, and because of what He knows the Spirit will do, even though He knows how terrified and confused they are going to feel in the next few days, Jesus can look His beloved disciples in the eye, and make them this promise: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” *How do you need to believe that this is true right now?* *How do you need to tug on this anchor and know that He’s holding firm?*

You know I get a lot out of the books of John Eldredge. Recently I started reading his book, *Walking With God*, for like the fifth time. On the first page of the introduction John sets the stage for the whole book when he makes this confession: “I’ve spent too many years trying to figure out life on my own.” Haven’t we all? “I’ve spent too many years trying to figure out life on my own. Reading books, attending classes, always keeping an eye out for folks who seemed to be getting the hang of things. I’d notice that the neighbor’s kids seemed to be doing well, and I’d think to myself, *What do they do that I’m not doing? Their kids are in sports. Maybe I should get mine in sports*. I’d walk away from a conversation with someone who seemed to be on the top of the world, and afterward I’d think, *She seems so well-read. I’m not reading enough. I should read more.* I’d hear that a colleague was doing well financially, and I’d quickly jump to, *He spends time managing his money. I ought to do the same.* We do this all the time, all of us, this monitoring and assessing and observing and adjusting, trying to find the keys to make life work. We end up with quite a list. But the only lasting fruit it seems to bear is that it ties us up in knots. Am I supposed to be reading now, or exercising, or monitoring my fat intake, or creating a teachable moment for my son?” (*Walking with God*, ix)

“I’ve spent too many years trying to figure out life on my own.” The sad thing is that this is how we are tempted to live our lives. In fact this was at the very root of what tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden. How often do we try to decide who we are and what we are worth and how well we are getting on by comparing ourselves to others? How often do we let something beyond our control determine how we will feel? How many times have you let something that wasn’t quite a perfect as you wanted to be mess up an otherwise beautiful moment? I think John is right. It just seems to tie us up in knots.

But think again about what Jesus says the Spirit will do. He wants to assure us deep in our hearts that we are not alone; we are not orphans, and the God of the universe in on our side. He wants to turn the Holy Spirit loose in us to lead us into all truth and give us His very own peace.

Imagine you are trying to read the Bible and you can’t figure something out. You could read a book, or search the web for someone else’s opinion. Or you could just take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit if there is something He might be trying to tell you. Jesus says this is the very thing the Spirit loves to do.

Imagine you are facing a difficult choice or decision. You could make a list of all the pluses and minuses. You could ask a close friend what to do. None of this is bad, but your friend can’t see around the corner and you are both working with limited information. But the Spirit can see around the corner and He has infinitely more information than we do. Not only can He point us in the right direction for what is right in front of us, but He can see how this decision fits into God’s divine and loving plan for our life.

What if you trusted the Spirit to help you to resist temptation, heal a relationship, or hang on in the midst of the storm? The Holy Spirit is the anchor we need. The Spirit alone is anchored as deeply and securely in us as He is in God.

Here’s my invitation. Actually it’s not my invitation at all, it’s Jesus’ invitation. Take what you are feeling or thinking or wrestling with right now and simply ask for the Spirit’s help. He’s on your side. He wants to give you the peace of Christ. He wants to tell you that you are not an orphan. We need to be rescued. We need a Savior. God sent the Spirit to make the rescue real, to make the Savior real. Let’s pray…