

Have you ever been one foot out the door and all of a sudden it hits (whoever it is that you live with) that when you say "Okay I'm heading out!" it really does mean, "I won't *be here* anymore." And then that triggers an avalanche of questions. What was it you said about leftovers in the fridge? What time are you coming back? Does the cat need his medicine?

Leading up to today's Gospel passage, Jesus has been talking with the disciples about how, he is *actually* leaving. But, unlike instructions for microwaving leftovers, the disciples are grappling with monumental doubts and a flood of questions about how they're going to continue the Jesus Movement...without Jesus.

In today's reading, Jesus is reassuring the disciples that he is not abandoning them, that there is a plan, and that they should not be troubled. Jesus tells them, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." Regarding this peace, Jesus specifies, "I do not give to you as the world gives to you." In the Gospel of John when Jesus says "the world" he is not referring to the planet Earth, but instead to all the flawed human concerns and priorities that seek to separate God's children from the Kingdom. (Think: greed, self-centeredness, a frantic 24 hour news cycle, the Real Housewives of Orange County...you get the picture.) "The world" claims to give, but it really takes.

At work recently I was drafting a grant for the Family Promise program when I realized that the corporation funding the grant wanted me to write about how we would acknowledge *them and their brand*. One minute I was writing about making sure homeless families had a place to launder their clothes, and in the next question they were reminding me to include "all marketing, publicity, and/or any other forms of visibility" we could provide for them. Sounds more like a corporate sponsorship and less like authentic generosity, doesn't it? "The world" claims to share, but it really just wants *more*.

Jesus draws a strong distinction when he says; "I do not give to you as the world gives to you." Jesus speaks of giving *authentically*. Authenticity can be rare in this world. When we encounter examples of authenticity, whether it's art or people or institutions, it's like a ray of sunshine in a shadowy room, it's countercultural- it's Christlike.

I recently attended a special service held at St. Paul's School with liturgy authored by our own Rev. Alice Courtright. It was "A Service of Repentance Toward Healing: Witness, lament, and apology for abuse at St. Paul's School." Its purpose was not to grant absolution to any person or institution. Instead, the service publicly offered a first step toward *honesty* regarding the school's history of dismissing and hiding sexual abuse. Honesty and authenticity are the only way out of a room as dark as that one, and Alice's liturgy was an example of the church at its best.

We recently lost one of the church's most authentic modern-day prophets, author and columnist Rachel Held Evans. She was tragically just 37 years old when she passed away from a sudden illness last month. Evans was known for being open and honest about not just her *beliefs*, but also about her *doubts*. To the question, "Why Christian?" she once brilliantly answered (quote) "I am a Christian because the story of Jesus is the story I'm willing to risk being wrong about." (end quote) She didn't feel she *knew* anything for sure, but she showed up for worship and ministry anyway. After her death, a multitude of her readers came forth (many of them millennials like her) who reported that because of her honest testimony they now were practicing Christians, and I pray the church honors her contributions by emulating the authenticity in her writing.

When I reflect on emulating authenticity in my personal day-to-day life, I know that I often fall short when it comes to being an *authentic listener*. Authentic listening is thinking about what a person is saying to you *instead* of thinking about what you'd like to say in response. For me, remembering to slow down and truly listen is going to require some serious self-improvement work, and chances are, I'm going to need a little *outside* help.

Which brings us back to our gospel reading. Jesus tells the disciples, "...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." Jesus is telling the disciples that he's leaving, but that when he does, God will send them the Holy Spirit, who he refers to here as The Advocate (also known in other translations as "The Helper" or "The Comforter" or "The Friend".) The Advocate will help them (and us) be the Jesus Movement, to implement his message, and really, when it comes down to it, to overcome any and all hardships that come with living in a broken world.

To me, it sometimes feels like the Holy Spirit is the easiest part of the Trinity to understand, and yet the hardest to explain. But the Holy Spirit is too important to not embrace, because, if we're open to the possibilities, there are a multitude of ordinary and mystical ways the Holy Spirit is present in our lives and helps us to live the authenticity of Jesus' teachings.

Let's take my own journey to become a more authentic listener. I've got some things to overcome, some combination of self-centeredness, immaturity, a tendency to rush, this panicky fear that I'll miss my chance in life to be heard. A whole mess of faults and insecurities. But the message of Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is there to teach me, help me, and advocate for me.

Now, the Holy Spirit *might* suddenly appear as a bright light and send an infusion of grace directly into my core making everything easy. Maybe. I think more often than not the Spirit manifests grace within everyday situations that you can't plan for and didn't expect. Here are some hypothetical ways the Spirit might teach, nurture ..or prod me along:

Say, I'm at a yard sale one day and I go to pick up a book that has fallen to the ground. This book might frame for me why authentic listening is a gift we can give others in a new and very helpful way that hasn't occurred to me before.

OR - true story - I get to have two fun years of working with a colleague who is especially gifted in the ministry of authentic listening and I learn from his example. (Do me a favor and don't tell Drew I mentioned him in my first ever sermon. His new parish doesn't need him walking in there with an inflated ego!)

OR - *another* true story - in conversation my Dad happens to tell me about a renowned investigative journalist, who always writes "S.U." in big letters in his notebook to remind himself to SHUT UP and listen to the subjects he's interviewing. If you notice a new tattoo on my arm sometime soon, *you'll* know why!

These are just examples of *some of the ways* I may experience the Holy Spirit in my own life. I'm sure Rev. Alice knows the unique ways the Holy Spirit was present as she took on the challenging task of authoring liturgy that honored the suffering of sexual abuse victims and acknowledged the complicity of an old and revered institution such as St. Paul's School.

And I wish the late Rachel Held Evans could have shared with us the exceptional ways the Holy Spirit was present when, being hurt and disillusioned by her childhood faith tradition, she was brave enough to not only find a new approach to being a Jesus Person, but to share that wisdom with us in her writings.

The Sunday after next we celebrate the first Christian Pentecost, which took place seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit came, amidst the beautiful chaos of multiculturalism, to reside in us so that in *this realm* - which we *know* is chock-full of heinous abuses of power, of reasons to doubt, and of self-centeredness - the Spirit came so that in this *faulted realm*, we have the strength and grace to admit our grievous wrongdoings, be honest about our doubts, and be authentic in our interactions with one another.

"I do not give to you as the world gives to you" is a vow that that none of the disciples - *and none of us* - has been abandoned, because the grace of the Holy Spirit is here with us twenty-four hours a day; present in prayer, in conversation, at the office, *at yard sales*, for as long as She is needed. Alleluia and Amen!