

John 14:15-21

Our readings in the lectionary during this season relate to the in-between time, the time between Easter and Jesus' resurrection and Jesus' ascension back to heaven. In the lessons, we read about the preparations Jesus is making for his followers as he gets ready to depart, something I'm sure the disciples were very concerned about. What were they going to do once Jesus left? How would they manage without his physical presence? What was the plan?

As people, we generally like to plan and prepare for the future and so when something happens that rocks our world and our plans, it can be extremely disconcerting.

12 years ago I was the Associate Rector a lovely church in Ohio when I gave birth to my first born Charlotte. As the end of my maternity leave came, I became extremely anxious about my return to work, as many working mothers do. It had been a very difficult pregnancy and first two months as a new mom. Making a decision about childcare was especially hard and though I had visited many daycare centers, nothing seemed good enough for my daughter. And then some friends recommended a young mother who did childcare out of her home and she came with rave reviews. I interviewed her, had a tour of her house, asked many questions, and felt really good about her. I felt I had planned really well- we all thought that.

And then the day arrived for me to leave Charlotte for the very first time. To say it was difficult is an understatement. She cried and I cried as I walked away that morning, but I planned to pick her up later that afternoon to ease our way into the transition. I remember rushing back to get her around 1pm that afternoon a little early, so desperate to see her. When I arrived at the house I saw her car seat sitting on the porch. I felt a little bit irritated about the car seat being on the porch because the home was located on a very busy street and I thought to myself, "Gee, someone could steal her car seat." I then walked up on to the porch and approached the closed front door. But just before going inside, something caused me to turn around and look at the car seat, which was now facing my direction directly behind me. And I had to do a double take: the car seat was not empty, it contained a child...in fact, it contained MY child. My 8 week year old Charlotte was asleep on the porch in her car seat all by herself, unattended on a porch along a busy street where anything could have happened to her, while the caretaker and other children were in the house behind a closed door. My heart jumped out of my chest and my

stomach sank as I started to physically shake: how could this possibly be happening? The very first time I ever leave my child with a caretaker, this is the result? I grabbed Charlotte, paid the woman her money and told her I would not be back. She made some excuse, but I walked away, on the verge of hysteria.

I drove immediately back to the church, carrying Charlotte, marched into the church office fighting tears and told the Rector, "I'm sorry, but I cannot leave Charlotte with a stranger at this time!" I relayed the whole story to him and I'll never forget his response. He said, "You're right, you can't leave her, and you can bring her with you to the office as long as you need to." It was such a grace. The next day when I came into the office, parishioners had placed a bouncy seat, baby toys and even a beautiful bassinet inside my office. My office happened to be located in a very private and quiet area of the church. Immediately outside my door was a sink and a bathroom and there was even a large counter atop some cabinets that was the size of a changing table.

I remember walking around my office that week, realizing that someone could not have designed a better office for a new mom than the one I had. Charlotte and I had everything we needed. And she came with me to work every day for the first 7 months of her life. She was an easy baby and sat quietly through counseling sessions and meetings. Staff and parishioners watched her when I needed to do something without her, but mostly she slept or played as I worked in those early days in that wonderful office. Looking back, I see that everything I needed was in place just when I needed it. God had provided me the position I needed, a very generous boss and Rector to work with, a parish full of understanding and supportive people, and even an office with everything a new mother needed. In retrospect, I am so very grateful that the childcare situation turned out to be such a disaster, because I would have missed out on those first seven months of having Charlotte by my side. I thought I had prepared, but God had prepared for something even better.

In our Gospel text, Jesus is telling his followers that even though he is leaving, that he is going to send them the Advocate to be with them forever. Even though Jesus would not be with them in bodily form, preparations had been made for his followers: the Advocate, which is the Holy Spirit - the paraklete- would be with them. "Paraklete" can be translated as either advocate or comforter, and it refers to someone who is right by your side to comfort, strengthen and advocate for you. So, the disciples were not going to be lost or totally without

and alone, they would have the Holy Comforter abiding with them and in them. Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned." You can hear Jesus' love and compassion just exuding from his words here. While Jesus had to leave and ascend, so that the church could do what they needed to do, he was going to be with them in a new and different way and a plan was already in place.

The promises Jesus gave to his followers are good for us as well. Jesus does not leave us high and dry either, even though we don't have him physically present, we have Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and within one another. We too have been given the Advocate and Comforter, we are not orphans. In this sense, we are never alone when we embark on the journey to follow Jesus. No matter what twists and turns our lives may take, this passage reminds us that God has a plan and has already prepared a way for us. Much of the time we cannot see the plan and it may even look terrible or bleak at any given moment, but God doesn't leave us high and dry, God already has something in mind and has prepared the way for us. God's plans are even better than our plans. We can, with confidence, place ourselves in God's hands, knowing that our futures, while not without trials, are ultimately safe in Christ.

Thanks be to God!