

“Someone to Watch Over Me”

John 14:1-3; 23-27

May 9, 2010

You know, God is good. And, I am thankful for a lot of things, but not a day goes by that I don't whisper a special prayer of thanksgiving that Alex Wilson has not listed me as a blocked caller on his cell phone. Because, I do call. Alex, I hate to bother you but the toilet in the women's bathroom won't cut off. Alex, can you help me carry in this copier paper? Alex, I know this is above and beyond the call of duty, but there's a mouse in the fellowship hall! So, when Alex goes out of town, I very selfishly think, "Well, who is going to watch over me?" It's the same feeling I had as a child when my parents would go out of town. Who is going to look after me? In fact, one commentator uses just that analogy to help us understand Jesus' long good-bye in John. He says, it's like this. A mother is preparing to leave her children to go on a trip. Her coat over her arm, she puts her hand on the doorknob to leave and turns to take one last look at her children who are playing peacefully in the middle of the floor. One of them suddenly looks up and notices she's about to leave. "Where are you going?" the child asks. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am there you may be also." "Can we go with you?" the child asks further. "Where I am going you cannot come." "How long will you be gone?" asks the confused child. "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while and you will see me." "Who will take care of us?" the child wonders. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever," the mother responds.

You see who the characters are. Jesus is the mother ready to take the next stage of the trip to the cross and to infinity and beyond, and the children are the disciples. Jesus even calls them "little children." So, is it too much to think of the Holy Spirit as our babysitter, the one looking after us while Jesus is away getting things ready, just like he promised.

That's a nice visual – Jesus getting things ready – practicing with the full-Gospel heavenly host angel choir so they can roll out the red carpet and give us a rousing welcome to heaven. Polishing those pearly gates so that they shine, shine, shine when we arrive. Or, maybe he's at the great Food Lion in the sky picking up our favorites. Or, maybe he is in the garden cutting fresh flowers for our rooms. He's got to be doing something, right? He's got to be doing something, because he is taking his own sweet time coming back. I don't preach much about the Second Coming partly because I cannot, for the life of me, figure out what is the hold-up? Just exactly how bad do we have to act before the Holy Spirit picks up the phone, calls Jesus, and says "Hey, man, you gotta come home. Your children are out of control."

But, maybe the Holy Spirit is hanging in because the Spirit believed Jesus when he said, "I'll be back in a little while." How long can he take? Well, when you ask your mother when dinner will be ready, and she says, "in a little while," you'd better get a snack. Or, when you ask your wife how long 'til she's ready and she answers, "in a little while," how long is that, guys? You might as well watch your John Wayne movie because it is useless to watch the clock. Biblically speaking, "in a little while" seems to mean 10 years, 100 years, 500 years, 1000 years. From where we sit in 2010, it has been so long since Jesus said, "I'll be back in a little while" that some of us wonder if he has forgotten. Is he gone for good? And if he is gone, where has he gone and what in the world will we do without him? And if he is not gone, what is he doing, exactly, and why doesn't he show himself? It's just like the child waiting for her mother to come back and take charge. Who will watch over us? And, what do we do in the meantime?

That is the question of the year for our church. What do we do in the meantime? To use the Alex Analogy again, when he goes away, I have work to do. If the toilet won't stop running, I at least have to figure out how to cut off the water. If I have something heavy to carry, oh, who am I kidding, I go next door and get a fireman. If there is a mouse in the fellowship hall, well, that one I'll save for Alex. But, my point is, the ministry must go on in the meantime.

If the disciples could do it, we can do it. No offense to them, but they were no better than us. They look Jesus in the eye, declare their loyalty and love, and then flee into the night. I don't blame them. Jesus told them to take up the cross and follow, but come on, Jesus, we'd like our redeemer to be more like a cushion than a cross, someone to soften the blows of life, a comfort amid the storm, something to make life go down a little easier. Did you come here this morning hoping that Jesus would make your life a little more difficult and complicated? Not I.

Yet, Jesus promises an Advocate to these disciples and us. This is important - he did not expect them - or us - to be faithful all by themselves. He didn't expect them to do anything by themselves. In fact, in the Gospel of John, he tells them they CAN'T do anything by themselves. He is sending an advocate - in the Greek, the word Advocate means one who is called alongside. The Holy Spirit is called alongside them to strengthen them to do all kinds of things that they could never do for themselves. Someone to teach and advise, but also someone who watches over us, comes alongside and handles situations that baffle us. We could all use an Advocate.

How many of you remember the TV show "Designing Women?" I loved Dixie Carter. She died recently, and columnist Connie Schultz wrote a tribute to her and her Designing Women character, Julia Sugarbaker. In this article, she says, "The passing of actor Dixie Carter has reminded me just how much most of us could use a friend like Julia Sugarbaker... the smartest and sassiest woman in the Southern Georgia foursome of "Designing Women." Oh, the thrill whenever Carter's Julia Sugarbaker set her sights on someone who had committed the crime of small-minded thinking, be it prejudice, sexism or just plain stupidity." That was Julia's thing - getting riled up - her loyalty made her a fierce power to behold. My favorite scene is at a beauty pageant after Julia hears an arrogant Miss Georgia bad-mouth her baby sister and former Miss Georgia, Suzanne Sugarbaker. Carter comes alongside of this beauty queen, Marjorie, and lets loose the storm of sisterhood: she defends Suzanne and her baton twirling talent so passionately and so eloquently that you want to stand up and cheer. This is her finale: "And you probably didn't know, Marjorie, that Suzanne was not just any Miss Georgia; she was the Miss Georgia. She didn't twirl just a baton; that baton was on fire. And when she threw that baton into the air, it flew higher, farther, faster than any baton has ever flown before - hitting a transformer and showering the darkened arena with sparks. And when it finally did come down, Marjorie, my sister caught that baton, and 12,000 people jumped to their feet for 16 and one-half minutes of uninterrupted thunderous ovation as flames illuminated her tear-stained face. And that, Marjorie - just so you will know and your children will someday know - is the night. The lights. Went out. In Georgia." Connie Schultz ends her article by saying, no matter how old we get, there always will be a Mean Girls Club. Most of us yearn for that Julia Sugarbaker kind of friend who overhears the nasty gossip and steps up to unravel the yarn on our behalf.

All of that to say that the Holy Spirit is kind of the Julia Sugarbaker of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the one who gets fired up, riled up, fed up and who steps up, who Advocates, who strengthens and inspires and who is in charge, and who does not mind reminding us that she is in charge until Big Daddy comes home. That's the plan.

God knows that the Christian life is too difficult to be done alone. When it comes to following Jesus, nothing is done alone. We have a spirit inside. Normally, this is where I would

venture off into Christian community – my favorite ‘preach it, sister’ topic! This is where I would tell you that we are meant to be TOGETHER. And, it would be a great Sunday to remind you of that because we’ve dedicated Cole, and we need to think about our shared responsibility for him as community – as the Body of Christ. Normally, that’s what I would say. But, I don’t want to tempt us to think that all Cole needs from us is fellowship. He can get fellowship from school, from the playground, from any number of places. I don’t want us to just give Cole conversation. Once he learns to talk, he can get conversation anywhere about anything. I want us to show Cole what it looks like when a community is bubbling with the Holy Spirit. I want Cole to experience how church is different. I want him to feel the safety and the security that comes from a fellowship full of the Holy Spirit. I want him to hear how people filled with the Holy Spirit shape the words coming out of their mouths. I want him to feel the warmth when we trust and we give each other the benefit of the doubt and we submit to the Holy Spirit unraveling every thing that keeps us apart. I want him to know that when he is here, he is not alone.

There is someone else home, in us and in Cole. That’s the promise. God and Jesus love us, and they will come to us and make their home with us...in a little while. We can’t change God’s schedule. But, in the meantime, we have this Advocate watching over us, ready to come along side us and inspire us and lead us on. And, it is happening. In fact, it just happened. It just happened with a group of people right here: your elders. They had a meeting, and lo and behold, the Spirit showed up at a church meeting! They became creative together, coming up with ideas none of them had thought of on their own. Feeding hungry children – we could do that? I mean, it is as if a fresh wind finally blew threw the room and cleared everyone’s heads and put us on track. You can call that anything you want, but I call it the Advocate, coming alongside and moving THEM to move US – stepping in to unravel the yarn on our behalf. That is just the beginning. If we will let the Spirit fill us in this meantime, who knows? We could fly higher, farther, and faster than any church has ever flown before showering this darkened world with heavenly light. Let’s start today. A new beginning. Are you in? Let’s give Lauren and Jamie reason to look back on this day, and this church, and say, and that, Cole Michael Ramsey – just so you will know and your children will someday know – is the day. The Light. Caught fire. In Wilson’s Mills. Can somebody give me an Amen?