

john 14. ^{16-21, 23}

¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

¹⁸I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. ²⁰At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

²¹He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him....

²³If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

While enjoying a happy, spiritual, and intimate Passover meal in a great “upper room,” Jesus delivered this unexpected and unwelcome news to his most trusted disciples:

“Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.”¹

Peter, confused and saddened by this announcement, and seeming to speak for all, asked, as one would expect one to ask who had grown accustomed to and dependent upon Jesus’ reassuring presence, “Lord, whither goest thou?”² Jesus, recognizing his disciples’ sorrow—“because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart”³—and in an attempt to soften the bad news he had delivered and the discomfort he had instilled, answered,

“Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.”⁴

But his attempt to comfort seems not to have had its intended result.

“Peter said unto him, ‘Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.’”⁵

It does not take the imagination of a poet to hear and appreciate the sorrow and worry in the disciples’ response to Jesus’ unwelcome announcement. They had spent three years with Jesus. In Jesus they had discovered a man of unmatched character. He had an answer for everything. He had a response to every need. It is difficult to overstate the degree to which the disciples had become attached to and dependent upon Jesus.

But for those who have, themselves, had even the smallest taste of his greatness and goodness, it is easy to imagine. It is easy to imagine the disciples’ concerns. “What will we do without Jesus? How can we live without him? We have always known we were weak, not up to his standards, but he has made us stronger, better. If he leaves, what’s to stop us from going right back to the pathetic, small,

¹ John 13.³³

² John 13.³⁶

³ John 16.⁶

⁴ John 13.³⁶

⁵ John 13.³⁷

undirected, worldly lives that we lived before he came into our lives?"

Yes, I can imagine their thoughts running something like this,

“Lone will be the night
If I cannot commune with thee
Nor find in thee my light.
The darkness of the world, I fear,
Would in my home abide.”⁶

Yes, I can imagine the many questions sweeping through their minds. His departure was cause for worry indeed. And so, from Jesus’ next words—“Let not your hearts be troubled”⁷— to the final words of his great Intercessory prayer—“that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them”⁸—Jesus sought, with a power that only he could call up, to comfort his grieving disciples. It is Jesus, as comforter, that I hear through every word Jesus speaks in John 14-17. If there are important and grand theological insights in these chapters, they play, for me, second fiddle. Jesus, the theologian, plays second fiddle to Jesus, concerned, caring, and committed friend.

Yes, imagine it. Jesus is more than a thinker and a teacher. He is a friend. “Ye are my friends,”⁹ assures Jesus.

Above all the other roles he plays in my life—and they are innumerable—this is the one that I cherish above all: caring, comforting, and committed friend. So, whatever deep doctrines we might think we find in Jesus’ words as spoken during his great last supper, it is Jesus’ promise of comfort and presence that resonates most deeply in me. I can imagine the comfort and peace the disciples felt when they heard Jesus promise,

“I will not leave you comfortless.”

I often require comfort. And I always need a friend. Yes,

“I need thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord.
No tender voice like thine
Can peace afford.
I need thee, oh, I need thee;
Every hour I need thee!
Oh, bless me now, my Savior;
I come to thee!”¹⁰

One of the purposes of Lent is to allow us to acknowledge our need for him; to confess our need for him. It is a good time to seek the comfort that only he can give. It is also a good time to consider how we can follow his example and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort.”¹¹ Lent is a time to plead for his comforting presence and companionship in our lives and in the lives of others who are, like us, in desperate need of his comfort and presence.

“Abide with me...
O Savior, stay this night with me;

⁶ LDS Hymn #165, “Abide with Me; ‘Tis Eventide

⁷ John 14.¹

⁸ John 17.²⁶

⁹ John 15.¹⁴

¹⁰ LDS Hymn 98, “I Need Thee Every Hour”

¹¹ Mosiah 18.⁹

Behold, tis eventide.
O Savior, stay this night with me;
Behold, tis eventide” “Lone will be the night
If I cannot commune with thee
Nor find in thee my light
The darkness of the world, I fear,
Would in my home abide.”¹²

Even so come, Lord Jesus!

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¹² LDS Hymn #165, “Abide with Me; ‘Tis Eventide”