

“Always With Us”
Psalm 66:16-20, John 13:15-21
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My wife asked me to go to Bel Air and buy some green onions last Friday. When I went into the store, I was surprised to see many balloons and flowers on display. I totally forgot that the graduation season began in early May. Speaking of graduation, I realized that I am not close to my own graduation as a parent. Last Sunday, I humbly accepted your feedback, I will extend my duty until these two boys decide to graduate from their parents. One church member reminded me that she is over 70 years old, but her parenting still goes on. Well, now I am afraid that I may never to be able to graduate from parenting school!

Regarding graduation, many schools use their graduation ceremony as “Commencement”. I guess that the word of commencement is more focused on a new beginning rather than the end of our work. Today’s Scripture readings are more related to a school setting. The Old Testament teaches us the nature of God and how God is so compassionate to us. The New Testament reading is like Jesus’ graduation speech to his students after he completed his mission and task. He is about to graduate his earthly school and is ready to return to His Heavenly Father. Imagine Jesus delivering his “farewell discourse” to his disciples and to you at God’s school commencement. What is the point of Jesus’ farewell discourse?

Jesus’ farewell address can be summarized in two words: Love and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was a teacher, activist and visionary to his disciples. Christianity is all about Love. Without love, how else can we explain the innocent death of the Son of God? God didn’t have any responsibility for our sins and our self-centeredness. The Old Testament teaches us about the love of God. The author of Psalm reminds us saying, “I cried aloud to him and truly God has listened. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.” As a parent for a newborn baby, now I am very sensitive about crying. For me, the baby has two faces: angel’s smile and monster’s crying. Sometimes, it is hard to find the cause of crying, so it is hard to fix it!! Last Wednesday morning, I talked with Sandy, one of our Jiffy Fixer handy men. Sandy, using a special electric gadget, was trying to detect a wood stud in the sanctuary building wall. He explained to me how the gadget worked. I joked with him I would like to have that kind of a magical gadget to understand why my baby cries so much and what’s on his mind. But nevertheless, when Youngjae and I hear Joshua’s crying, we respond to him

immediately. It is the same confession in our Scripture reading. Our God won't ignore our prayer, but seeks us out no matter what and patiently listens to our crying. This is our God.

At the New Testament reading, Jesus emphasizes this love. He challenges us saying, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus's great commandment is well described in John 13:34. It says, "Let me give you a new commandment: Love one another in the same way I loved you, you love one another." The love in Jesus is not an abstract philosophical description of God but is very much a practical exercise. The love that Jesus taught his disciples is not about self-narcissism, but rather it is about human dignity respecting all other human beings. We treat others as equally important. When we love others, Jesus said to us that God abides with us and God will be in us. In verse 20, Jesus reminds us of our relationship with God. It says, "On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." What does this mean?

Our Methodist founder, John Wesley illustrated our relationship with God using a house metaphor. Our Methodism differs from other protestant denominations in terms of our relationship with God. We are more specific about 'sanctification'. Our Methodism has two pillars: One individual sanctification and social sanctification. He describes how grace is a connection point and how we build our relationship with God. He talked about three levels of grace which are *prevenient grace*, *justifying grace*, and *sanctification grace*. He first compared *prevenient grace* to the *porch* in front of the house. When we experience *prevenient grace*, God has invited us into the house, but we haven't yet accepted the invitation. We are still standing just outside the door. Secondly, *justifying grace—the door*. John Wesley compared justifying grace to the door of the house. When we respond to God's invitation and open the door into God's house, we are right with God and have assurance that our sins are forgiven. Last, *sanctifying grace—the interior*. When we enter the house, and once we're in the house, there are a lot of rooms for us to explore. Sanctifying grace is the grace that guides us when we're inside the house, helping us mature in faith and live a holy life. Here, John Wesley's understanding of sanctifying grace is not merely a place to explore and stay for temporary period, but we are invited to **dwell in** the house of the Lord. The authentic love and Christian faith is not an emotional rush nor feeling on the assurance of salvation. Moreover, it is more honor and privilege to live in God and He in us. What Jesus requires us to do is acts not words, devotion not emotion, our commitment not our feelings always in the way we live.

As we abide with God, we also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples that he wouldn't leave them alone. Rather, he assured his

disciples that the Spirit will come and guide them. The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as an advocate, counselor and guide. The Gospel of John compares the Spirit to the wind. We know well enough how the wind blows this way and that, but we have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. In the same way, we cannot see the Holy Spirit but we know how the Spirit moves and works in us and guide us. If we accept Jesus as our Savior, the Spirit continues to inspire us and guides to practice love in our daily lives. The Spirit links us to God bringing Christ's promised presence to dwell in us. So let us be open to the winds of the Spirit. Wherever we practice love, God will be in us and we will be in God. Let us remember Jesus' promise that He will be always with us through our love and the Holy Spirit. Amen.