

"God Revealed"
Rev. Melanie Homan
May 21, 2017

John 14:15-21

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Advocate, to be with you always. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees her nor knows her. You know the Spirit, because she abides with you, and will be within you.

¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in God, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by Abba God, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Every MEA weekend, our entire extended family gets together for a reunion and stays in a hotel for the weekend. All of us cousins would swim, play cards, and run around the hotel. I vividly remember the MEA weekend of October 1987. It seems that the Minnesota Educators Association conference when all of us kids had some extra days off, always fell during the World Series. The Twins were in the World Series (It's been way TOO long since we've been in the World Series!) and the adults wanted to watch the big game on a big screen – no small 16 inch hotel room tv would do. So what did we do? Our entire family camped out in the hotel bar – all 30 of us, including kids, so we could watch the game on the big screen. One of our uncles had found homer hankies for the entire family, and so we waved our Homer Hankies and cheered for the Twins each night.

If that wasn't fun enough, something even more exciting happened! There was a weekly drawing for a 1965 Red Ford Convertible Mustang at the hotel bar. Each week a name was drawn and that person received a key. Twenty-five keys were given away, and then on one big weekend, all of the key recipients were told to come back for festivities and they would see which key started the car. In the midst of the World Series game, my mom's name was called – her name had

been drawn and she received her key – the key that would potentially start the car of my DAD’s dreams. We had to wait months before the big weekend, when we travelled back to the hotel to see if the car was going to be ours.

My sister was 9, I was 11, and for those 12 weeks or so, we spent all of our time thinking about that key and that beautiful car, begging our mom to let us hold the key. Just holding it was enough to let our imaginations go wild, as we thought about all of the cool places we would go in our new “old” car. We convinced ourselves that our parents would give the car to us once I turned 16, since it would be the oldest car we had. My sister and I had lots of plans for that car, and they were all riding on that key.

The time finally came for us to get into our “not so cool” ‘84 Chevy Cavalier and make our way to the hotel. There were hundreds of people around, and one by one, each person opened the car door, slid into the seat of the mustang, and tried their key. They drew numbers to see who would go first, and my mom was number 25 – the last person.

Each person got into the car, and each person got out – the car didn’t start. The 20th person tried the car, and we were jumping up and down we were so nervous and excited.

The 21st person, the 22nd, the 23rd. No one had started the car yet – the 24th person tried to start it, and they didn’t have the right key. My sister and I were going crazy jumping up and down, figuring that the car HAD to be ours – mom had the last key! She ran to the car, jumped in, and tried to start it.

But nothing happened.

Our elation quickly became confusion, which quickly became denial and desperation as the guy holding the mic and playing 50’s music opened up the hood of the car and plugged the battery in. How could he! It was supposed to be a suspense builder, to let everyone have a chance, but no one with a key was happy with the tactic.

For a second time, each key holder gave it a shot. By key 12 or 13, someone had started up the car, and it wasn’t my mom. We were crushed as we watched

another excited family jump into the mustang that was supposed to be ours, revving it up and imagining all of the fun places THEY were going to get to go in their new "old" car. We ate supper and then headed home, not in a Ford, but a Chevy.

This story came back from the cobweb-filled recesses of my memory, as I reflected on our scripture passage for this morning. The Gospel of John continues with this long, confusing, and meandering talk from Jesus that takes three chapters and in the midst of this long Farewell discourse that Chris also talked about last week, little gems pop up that have offered consolation and comfort to people throughout the ages. Words we often use at funerals, Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, And God will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. I have said these things while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Jesus tells us in John that the Holy Spirit will dwell within us, within our hearts – that God and Jesus will take up residence and abide within us. When we make room for God to settle into our space, then the Spirit, the Advocate, has a chance to work within and throughout our lives. The Spirit teaches us, leads us, towards opening our hearts and offering KEYS to the doors that open into our lives. It allows us to offer those keys to those around us who desperately need to be a part of our lives. We open ourselves to spouses, children, friends, colleagues, other people in this community. The indwelling of God opens us to relationships that go beyond the superficial and enter into friendships that are spiritual, mutual, and intimate.

Nudged by the Spirit, there are keys that we offer to people in our lives, both who we need and who need us, that invite them in.

But these words of Jesus, as much as they speak to the individual, speak to the communal as well. These words of Jesus were before his crucifixion. They may seem to be odd words to celebrate during this season of Easter. The reason we

use them during Easter, is that they point towards the future that Jesus was speaking of, when the Holy Spirit would come, and would lead us in understanding the words of Jesus as we and those before us keep trying to live as Christ would have us live!

As a church, we believe that it is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who brought about the birth of the church, the community of followers of Christ. Just as the Spirit dwells and abides within us, the Spirit dwells and abides within the church. Barbara Brown Taylor writes of this passage, "I am a little fuzzy on the details, as John himself is, but abiding seems to involve becoming part of the large extended family, and a holy one at that.

When God and Jesus move in with (all of) us, apparently, they make lots of keys – keys for the Holy Spirit, keys for the other disciples, keys for all kinds of indwelling cousins in Christ. Coming and going, we learn to recognize each other, and to call upon each other for everything that people who live together do."

The good news is that these keys that God makes, that invite all people into the largest of Christian homes – the CHURCH – these keys are not like the ones that my mom carried around with her for weeks, wondering if it would start up the deep desire within her for such a beautiful thing. Each of those 25 people held onto their keys, different people that they were – they all held onto those keys in the hopes that THEIR key would bring them a wonderful gift. The keys that God makes – Well each and every one of them opens the door of this community, for each and every person to receive the desperately desired and wonderful gift of experiencing the holy. Jesus said, "I do not give to you as the world gives."

It doesn't matter if you have an old key, a new key, a broken key, and electronic key that doesn't even look like a key. Each one opens a door into the dwelling places and joy of Christian community. As Barbara says, in our coming and going, we learn to recognize each other, even if our keys don't look alike, and we can rely upon one another like people who live together, do.

Pentecost is in just a few weeks, when we celebrate the birth of the church. On Pentecost we will hear more about the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, that

we receive from God. This divine presence is promised to the community. On Pentecost, the people were speaking many different languages and they all came together and worshipped God, and the Holy Spirit was burning like a fire among them.

We speak different languages today, but not the way we are used to thinking of language.

Yes, most of us here speak English and if you're lucky, you speak more than one language. If you've ever been to a worship service in another language, it can be a wonderful experience of having no clue what the people are saying – yet being fully confident that the Spirit of God is active and moving within the community of worshipers and even if you don't understand it, you trust that you are worshiping and praising God.

The different languages that are speaking and praising God today that WE experience, happen more often WITHIN the English language. Call them dialects, if you will – the different ways that words are put together with sounds and movements and smells that might not make sense to us, but we can trust that the Spirit of God is active and moving within the community and that we are worshiping God, even if we don't prefer it for ourselves or it's not something we are used to.

One of the things I love about Lake Harriet United Methodist Church, is that we have a long tradition of changing and transforming so that more peoples' keys will work to open the doors and to find welcome in this community. From day one when I came here, it was clear that you care about being inclusive and intergenerational. You don't just say it – you live it. You care about welcoming people, no matter their gender, orientation, age, status, ability. And that's something to claim and be proud of.

Over the years, you turned the entire sanctuary around to make the space more welcoming and flexible for worship. You added a second worship service that was different than the first service, because you cared about more peoples keys opening into this space with God. You started a theater ministry to create more openings into this community. You've offered free vacation bible school, multiple

music groups to be part of, and opportunities for youth to be in mission and service. Time and time again, you have made big choices that affirm your commitment to making sure people's keys open the doors of our community and that all are welcomed here with open arms.

From the conversations that I have had since our Winter Leadership retreat, where 25 lay leaders decided to move forward with a new Wednesday evening worship service, I've heard a lot of feedback. We do worship at Lake Harriet well, and we have an amazing choir and incredibly gifted musicians and band members who are top notch and we offer a couple of dialects that really connect with our community. An entirely different way of worship might be something you are open to every now and then, but it's not something that you want to replace the language and style of worship that most connects you to God. The keys you have to the church fit, and you want to make sure that they continue to fit, because you've found a precious gift in this place.

Yet I've had other conversations with people who are concerned about how we change and transform to connect with those who might think their keys DON'T fit the sanctuary doors. We want to offer a worship experience that connects with our youth, that encourages experimentation, where failure and success are both ok. We want to provide a space for more people to share their own stories and experiences of transformation as worship leaders. And we also recognize that some peoples' keys do not work on Sunday mornings – because of their work schedules or travel schedules. And as a recent article in the Star Tribune called it – “Wednesday is the new Sunday” for many families.

It is the natural response of this community to find ways to adapt and make space for new fruits of the spirit to emerge. So I'm excited. I'm grateful to be in a place with such a long legacy of welcome and openness. And I'm excited to see where the Spirit will take us.

As I remember back to those days when my sister and I held that key and dreamt of all the possibilities it might unlock for us - we knew that only *one* of the 25 people who had keys would drive off into the sunset in their new mustang. That's the way things work in the world, but that's *not* the way they work in the

Church. The Spirit of God is tossing out keys to everyone, and not for something as material as a collector's car, but for something as eternal and ultimate as God's grace, God's hope, God's love, and God's salvation. The Spirit isn't interested in the ways of the world, where there always seems to be winners and losers. The Spirit is working within us and within the Church to share as many keys and to welcome as many people as desire God, into this faithful community. The Spirit is working in us, so that OUR keys open our hearts to others.

It is our joyful responsibility, as the body of Christ, to make sure that many different keys open the doors to the community of faith. We may not worship alike, talk alike, look alike, and as John Wesley said, we may not even think alike, but our hearts will be of the same mind in Christ – so that there will be “keys for all kinds of indwelling cousins in Christ. Coming and going, we can learn to recognize each other, and to call upon each other for everything that people who live together do, in this great dwelling place of God.”