

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: May 14, 2023 Yr. A, 6th Sunday of Easter

Text: John 14:15-21 Jesus promises the coming of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit

Title: The Power of an Advocate

Focus: As Jesus describes in the gospel reading, we have an Advocate in the Holy Spirit, who abides with us as the presence of God. We too can serve as advocates for others who need someone to walk alongside them and sometimes to act on their behalf. Good Shepherd has recently become partners with Foster the City, FTC, whose mission is to inspire and equip churches to care for vulnerable children in foster care.

Gospel Text: John 14:15-21

[Jesus said to the disciples] ¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

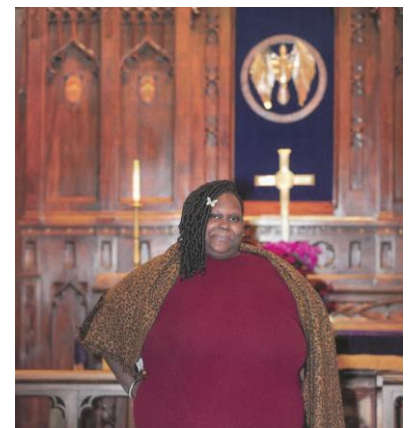
¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those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

Advocates at Work

I was reading the recent issue of *Living Lutheran* this week.¹ The tagline of the magazine is "Stories of God's People Living their Faith." The words *advocate* and *advocacy* kept popping up in the stories. Here are some ways these Lutherans are Living their Faith as Advocates:

Deanna Branch is an advocate. She and her family have suffered from lead exposure from living in substandard housing.

She explains, "My younger son, Aidan, was severely impacted by exposure to lead poisoning and had to be hospitalized twice due to the lead hazards in our unsafe housing conditions."



¹ *Living Lutheran*, May/June 2023 issue.

Because of her personal experience, she is an advocate with a group called **COLE, the Coalition on Lead Emergency**. They work for the removal of lead in water, paint, and soil, the three main sources of lead exposure. As a part of her leadership through COLE, she was invited to introduce Vice President Kamala Harris when the VP traveled to Milwaukee, where Deanna lives and works. Later she attended a summit on Accelerating Lead Pipe Replacement at the White House and was the VP's guest and the State of the Union Address.

Here's how she explains her transition from local mom to national advocate:

- “Aidan’s love inspired me to speak openly about the personal problems my family was facing. My story inspired a lot of other families to share their stories of lead exposure. My shame turned to outrage and advocacy for my community” (p. 8).
- She’s also written a book called ***Aidan: The Lead-Free Superhero*** describing the impact of lead poisoning on her son Aidan. Aidan drew the pictures for the book.
- She expresses her faith this way: “I’m a Lutheran because I love God and I know God loves me. It is through God’s love that I was able to accomplish the things I have accomplished. God is keeping me alive for that purpose and I want to honor God’s love by fulfilling my purpose and sharing God’s love with my family” (p. 8).²

What’s an Advocate?

What’s an *advocate*? How would you define an advocate? What does an advocate do?

An advocate is a person who works on behalf of vulnerable people who may not be able to take that step themselves. An advocate walks alongside others and sticks up for or speaks up on behalf of a person who may not be able to do so for themselves—or at least may not be able to do that right now. An advocate is someone who encourages you and supports you. Someone who is willing to hang in there with you no matter what.

² See more of her story at <https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/leadfreesuperhero/>

How Do You Picture the Holy Spirit?

During our Tuesday Bible study, we were talking about the Holy Spirit as an advocate. I asked other people what image or picture they have in their head of the Holy Spirit: How do they think of the Holy Spirit—about what that person of the Trinity is and does? Then they turned my question around on me and asked me for how I picture God in three persons. I told him that it is easy for me to be outdoors and enjoy walking along the Truckee River or hiking at Lake Tahoe and think of God and the love and power of God expressed in creation—so it's easy for me to think of God as creator as the first person of the Trinity.

And it is easy for me to see Jesus in scripture, and the multiple encounters he had with people to see his love and compassion for the overlooked and outcast. So I can picture Jesus as the second person of the Trinity.

I told them that it is harder for me to have a strong picture of God is in the third person and to picture God at work as the Holy Spirit. So, this image of the Holy Spirit as Advocate is helpful to me.

The Holy Spirit as Advocate

In today's reading, the Holy Spirit is described as an advocate for us. We are in chapter 14 of John, immediately following what we read last week. To remind you, Jesus is talking with the disciples in what we call The Farewell Discourse. Jesus knows that his death is near and so he is speaking plainly with the disciples to prepare them and reassure them. He offers them comfort and hope.

Here he promises that though he himself will not be with them in a bodily way as he has, **they will not be left “orphaned”** (Isn't that a strong and surprising word?!) or alone, but will have the ongoing presence of God in the Holy Spirit.

If Deanna Branch, the advocate in our example, speaks up on behalf of her son and community and others who are affected by lead poisoning, what does the Holy Spirit as advocate do?

The promise in this text is that even after Jesus' death, God will continue to *abide* with them and God love will be made known in them.

Did you hear the way that Jesus specifically described this promise? He said, “[God] will give you *another* advocate” (v. 16).

Meaning that this isn't the first advocate, but the second. The first was Jesus. Jesus was and is your Advocate, and when he is about to leave his disciples, knowing how hard the path set before them would be, he promises to send another Advocate – someone who will love them as much as he did.

Elsewhere in scripture, it says that the spirit prays for us, and the spirit cries out for us when our pain is too deep for words:

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes* with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God,* who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27).

Kim is an Advocate for Children and Parents

As pastor and mom, Kim is an advocate for children and families and describes how others can do the same:

“Parenting is hard work and full of doubts, but there's also a joy and wonder laced throughout our days. We hear our babies' first words and watch them take their first steps.

- A neighbor drops off a meal.
- The church lifts you in prayer.
- A friend texts, ‘You're going great.’

Hope and heartache mingle throughout our days, but something else persists: God's grace” (p. 11). Advocates are a sign and reminder of that grace.



A friend is an Advocate with CASA.

A friend of mine is an advocate with CASA. CASA is a nationwide organization. CASA has “Advocate” in its name: Court Appointed Special Advocates.

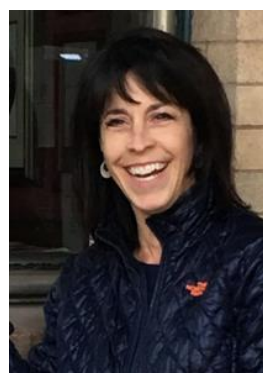
CASA exists because children sometimes need to be removed from their birth family because of substantiated abuse and neglect. The family court judge may also request that a CASA volunteer be paired with a vulnerable child.



- **Mission:** CASA's mission is to ensure children in the foster care system have a voice and the services they need to thrive.

Cara is an Advocate with Foster the City

Foster the City is a regional nonprofit in different cities in the West, including here in Northern Nevada. Just this spring, Good Shepherd formed a partnership with FTC. Cara Paoli, who is a member of Good Shepherd's Governing Board, is termed the Advocate as the one who will lead and direct our efforts on behalf of foster children and families.



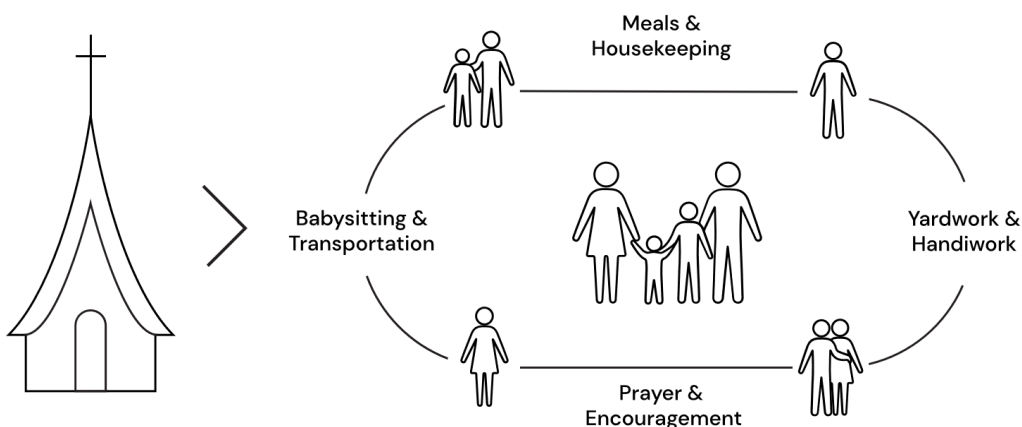
- **Need:** Cara has said that there are currently 625 children in the foster care system in Washoe County.
- Like how I described with CASA, children are removed from their homes because of abuse and neglect.
- Foster families provide a home, but there is greater need than there are open homes. Children, of course, do best in family settings in homes.
- Because of the strain and stress of being a foster family, FTC reports that 60% of foster families nationwide won't continue past 1 year. (Figure provided by Kate Schmidt, see p. 7 of their 2023 Strategic Plan.)
- “The rate of retention for Foster Families dramatically improves when fostering takes place within the context of a supportive community” (p. 7)

Here's the model
that FTC has
developed to
provide support:

FTC's strategy is to
partner with
churches: **Mission:**

**"To inspire and
equip churches to**

**raise up at least one foster family and four support friends until there are more
than enough families to meet the need."**



- Support Friend within the church
 - Meals
 - Chores around the home
 - Help with transportation
 - Prayer and encouragement

We are just getting started in this partnership with FTC. So, you'll continue to hear more. You can share in this work of advocacy with FTC as well. Cara is available today to talk.

Thanks be to God for the Holy Spirit as Advocate, who is the enduring, abiding presence of God walking alongside us.

Thanks be to God for opportunities to be "God's people living their faith" who can be advocates for the vulnerable, too.