

Farewells can mingle and then express seemingly contradictory emotions. Endearing sentiments may be held in tandem, or tension, with “now don’t you. . .” or “make sure you. . .” after I’m gone. The binding of love between the one who speaks and the one who receives such words may heighten, not lessen, their paradoxical notes.

Take our reading from John. Scholars designate this and the next several chapters as Jesus’ “farewell discourse.” Before his crucifixion and death. Jesus is saying goodbye. But listen to the farewell instruction that opens our passage: “**If** you love me, you will keep my commandments.” We may debate what “my commandments” refers to, especially when we hold that word in tension with Christ’s grace freeing us from the demands of law. But make no mistake: in Jesus’ words of farewell in John, keeping Jesus’ commands is not merely one option we are free to choose or not from the smorgasbord of Christian callings. “If you love me, you **will**. . .”

It may not be coincidental that the very **next** word Jesus offers in farewell involves the promise of God’s Spirit, named here as *Paraclete*. The word literally means “to call alongside.” In Greek society, it was originally used in judicial settings in reference to a legal assistant who helped represent one in court. By the time of John’s writing, *paraclete* took on added meanings and associations. That broadening of understanding is reflected in the various ways this word is translated in different Bible versions. Advocate. Comforter. Counselor. Helper.

The work of God’s Spirit among and within us involves every one of those functions, and more. So consider how such varied functions of the Spirit provide both model and empowerment for our ministries as individuals and communities of faith. In every case, ministries grounded in love that keeps Jesus’ words. Ministries of advocacy, where we speak and act for those who might otherwise be alone and without voice. Ministries of comfort, where we serve as instruments of holy presence in the midst of suffering and grief. Ministries of counseling, where we draw on the insight of scripture and theology and community to provide guidance for living. Ministries of helping, where we seek to meet others in their most basic needs. Ministries that, at the core, embody our love for Christ in

the keeping of his commands. Commands that Jesus both summarized and lived: love God, love neighbor as self. If you love me, you **will** . . .

For Reflection and Action:

What goodbyes have you heard, or spoken, that blended sentiment with commission?

How does “if you love me, you will . . .” inform our following of Jesus; our view of grace?

Where do you see Spirit empowering ministries of: advocacy; comforting; counseling; helping?