

## A Storytelling Commentary on John 14:23-29

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These episodes of Jesus' final speech to his disciples are in response to a question from Judas. Note that the question does not come from Judas Iscariot. There are two Judas' identified in the various lists of disciples. This is the only occurrence of the Judas other than Judas Iscariot in the Gospel of John. He has previously been an unknown character. His question is, "Why are you going to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

The mnemonic structure of Jesus' response to Judas is first of all around the theme of "Those who love me will keep my word." In the two sentences of the first episode, as you can see, "Those who love me will keep my word; whoever does not love me does not keep my word." Recognizing this AB verbal thread in the first episode will help you remember it.

The second episode returns to the theme of "saying these things while I am with you and then the Advocate—the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name—will teach you everything and remind you of all that I've said to you. There are no explicit verbal threads in this episode. The contrast is between the things that Jesus has said to them, and the things that the Advocate—the Holy Spirit—will say to them after Jesus is gone.

The next episode is focused on peace, on Jesus' gift of peace: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you."

The fourth episode is Jesus' response to their being troubled: "Don't be troubled," "Don't let your hearts be troubled; don't let them be afraid," and "You heard me say to you I'm going away and I'm coming to you." This last comment is a reference to an earlier statement of Jesus prior to these episodes and returns to the theme of their anxiety and grief at the prospect of his death.

The final episode is on the theme of rejoicing that Jesus is going to the Father. He is in effect rejoicing at his death, and giving his disciples a perspective from which to evaluate his death that is positive. Note the last sentence: "I told you this before it occurs so that when it *does* occur you may believe." This theme—"before it occurs, when it occurs"—is a verbal thread that reiterates the underlying theme of the entire speech.

The spirit of this part of Jesus' speech is directly in response to Judas and his questions. The initial answer to Judas' question is that the one who loves Jesus keeps his words, and the one who does not love him does not keep his words. Furthermore, these are the words of *God* not of him because Jesus says what the Father tells him. Jesus reveals himself to the disciples because they love him and keep his commandments. Their keeping his words is the sign of love and of the process of Jesus revealing himself to those who keep his words.

The phrase "to keep his words" means to hold onto his words and keep them in your heart and to make them part of your memory. Those who keep Jesus' words are those to whom he makes things clearer, those to whom he reveals himself. This is in part because they do keep his words and are loved by God. To those who do this, Jesus promises that, "We will come and make our home with them." If you keep Jesus' words in your heart, Jesus' spirit will gradually become more present within you.

The promise is that those who keep Jesus' words will be the recipients of the gift of God's presence: God the Father and Jesus the Son. It's a promise that they will come and live with us and make their homes with us. This is directly related to the process of keeping Jesus words, of holding them in our heart. So it is directly related to the process of learning Jesus' words by heart and keeping them in your heart.

The second part concerns the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the first episode, the focus has been on the Father and the Son. The second episode focuses on the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send who will teach you and remind you of all that I've said to you. The word "remind" means "bring back to memory." It is to enable you to recall Jesus' words and the things that he said. The composition of the Gospel itself is an act of the Holy Spirit that enables us as listeners to remember Jesus' words. The Holy Spirit will refresh our memory. Each of these episodes deals with the central role of memory in our experience of Jesus. The Holy Spirit enables us to remember and to be reminded of Jesus' words.

The gift of peace is the fruit of this process of keeping Jesus' words. The process of remembering Jesus' words leads to peace. That's what Jesus identifies when he says, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives." In this process of keeping Jesus' words one will experience peace, which is the opposite of being troubled or anxious. The logic is, "I will give you peace; therefore, don't let your hearts be troubled and don't be afraid." Anxiety and fear are the opposite of being at peace and rejoicing that Jesus is going to the Father.

So what would we be troubled about? We are anxious about his death and about our own death. Jesus' words are a reminder to not let our hearts be troubled or afraid because he is going to the Father. We don't need to grieve for him. The last episode is focused on the gift of love: "If you love me you'll rejoice that I'm going to the Father." Rejoicing is what Jesus recommends as the response to the prospect of his imminent death. The same then is true in relation to one's own death. It is fully appropriate to rejoice for one who is going to the Father, who is going to be with God.

This part of Jesus' speech is a profound meditation on the responses to Jesus' imminent death, and the questions his death raises. In this case it is Judas' question, "Why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world." It is because the process of revelation involves an intimate relationship of love and of keeping Jesus' words in the heart, and the world does not do that. This is a part of Jesus' final words to the disciples that invites us as his followers and the ones who love him to keep his words and to make them part of our deepest selves.