

God dwelling with us and in us

St Brandon's

Acts 17:22-31; John 14:15-21

10 May 2026

I'm acutely aware that this morning's readings, and particularly the reading from John's gospel that I want to focus on, don't seem to have anything to say to the national situation following Thursday's elections, nor to the international situation with its continuing crises in the Middle East, Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and so on. Nor do the readings necessarily speak into whatever situations we find ourselves in in our own lives. So, all of these will need to be the subject of our prayers.

I want to focus on the gospel reading, partly just because it's what's set for us, but also because it says some pretty fundamental things about our Christian faith and life. And having those things perhaps a little bit clearer may help as we are sent out from this place to live out our Christian faith in our communities and in the world around us.

The gospel reading is, as you probably know, just a small part of Jesus's farewell discourses as He speaks to His disciples at the last supper. Occupying pretty much all of what we have as Chapters 13-17, it's a very dense set of teaching. And today's relatively short passage is no exception – in it we have words at the beginning and end about love and commandments and the relationship between them; something about the Holy Spirit (so anticipating Pentecost in two weeks' time); something about Jesus's own death and resurrection; and something about Jesus and the Father (so completing the Holy Trinity and anticipating Trinity Sunday in three weeks' time). And all in just seven verses!

But I want to focus down on just two one-syllable and inter-related words: "with" and "in".

Jesus says that He will ask the Father and the Father will give us another Advocate or helper, the Spirit of truth, who will "be *with* you for ever". And Jesus says further of the Spirit that we know Him "because he abides *with* you".

There's a book (1992) and associated film (1996) called 'The English patient' set in Egypt in which the heroine Katherine is horribly injured in a plane crash in the desert. Her lover Laszlo, the only other person alive out there in the desert, has to decide whether to stay with her or to head off to Cairo, three days' walk away, to try to get help. He decides on the heroic path, but returns to find that Katherine has died. It's a kind of parable for our times, contrasting the heroic doing something *for* others, instead of being the one thing Katherine truly needed which was to have her lover *with* her as she died.¹

Jesus, by contrast, says that the Holy Spirit will abide *with* us and will be *with* us for ever. In the same way, Jesus says to His disciples at the very end of Matthew's gospel, "And remember, I am *with* you *always*, to the end of the age" (28:20). In other words, God won't leave us when we need Him most, but will be with us in all the circumstances of our lives, right up to and including our death.

¹ This story is told in Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto. Being with God*, Wiley, 2015, in which he focuses on the word 'with' as the most important word.

But there is one caveat to this. It's rather too easy to slip from this 'being with' to claiming that God is and always will be on our side. I was struck recently, when reading something else, of the story in the book of Joshua when Joshua is about to lead the Israelites into the promised land. And he saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand, and so asks him, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?". In other words, "Whose side are you on?". To which the man replies, "Neither; but as the commander of the army of the Lord I have now come" (5:13-14). *Neither!* God is not automatically on Joshua's side, not automatically on *our* side, but is always on the side of right and the truth (hence the Spirit of truth).

So, God being with us is conditional. And in our reading the conditions are related to loving God and keeping His commandments. And you might have noticed how closely related these two are: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments", it says at the beginning. "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me", it says at the end. So, these two are inseparable, and as we both love God and keep His commandments, so He will be with us always in all the circumstances of our lives.

But there is more, because we now need to move on to look at the second word, "in". Jesus says of the Spirit that not only does He abide *with* us, but that "he will be *in* you". And He says later in the reading, "On that day" (in other words the day of His resurrection, when they will see Him again after His death), "you will know that I am in my Father, and *you in me*, and *I in you*".

This takes the 'being with' to another level, an even more fundamental 'being in'. Us in God, God in us. It is as St Paul said in his speech to the Athenians that, '*In him* we live and move and have our being'. And St Paul speaks elsewhere of this when he says of the glory of the mystery of the gospel that it is, "*Christ in you*, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

I think we know something of this when we use it in the negative. We sometimes find ourselves saying of someone else that 'they wouldn't let us in'. In other words, they kept their distance, wouldn't let us get close, wouldn't reveal anything personal about themselves. By contrast, Jesus says at the end of our passage, "I will love them and reveal myself to them". I will let them – us – in.

And, perhaps by way of summary, if we read on a little after our passage ends, we would find Jesus saying, "Those who love me will keep my word [love and commandments], and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (14:23).

So, from all of this, we have God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit being *with* us and dwelling *with* us and *in* us. Or as Paul put it elsewhere, "So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

That is our condition as Christians individually and communally. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit with us and in us, and we in Him. Ponder on that. Give thanks to God for it. And then let's go and live it out.

Amen