

St. Andrew's Sermons  
The Rev. John D. Rohrs  
6 Easter A; May 29, 2011  
Gospel: John 14:15-21

## **The Gospel According to Oprah**

I'm glad to be here this morning, because this last week has been an emotional one in our house. Not because of my sister's wedding; it was a great time, very joyful. And not because there's anything wrong with our kids; they're fine. No, it was a tough week because after 25 years, Oprah did her last show, and Andie is taking it pretty hard. She didn't watch it every day but she kept up with the stories, and in a way she kind of grew up on Oprah.

So the other day when the kids were in bed, we watched the finale. I was there for moral support and pastoral care if need be, but I have to say, it was pretty moving. There were no celebrities, no surprise announcements. It was just Oprah sharing her life lessons. If I had to summarize it, basically her message was that every person matters. Every person is worthy of love and is called to love in return.

Now that may sound a bit smushy, and I'll admit I rolled my eyes a few times. But it's absolutely true. In fact, this message parallels our gospel story. Today's gospel has Jesus preparing the disciples for his departure. Up to this point, they'd been basking in the glow of the resurrection. Jesus had returned and all was well. But then, in last week's lesson, Jesus broke the news that he had to leave. He was going ahead to prepare a place for them in heaven.

Well, they didn't like the sound of that. "Where are you going?" the disciples cried. "We don't know the way. We don't know what to do without you!" This desperate plea brings us to today's passage, and it's a critical one. It's one of the biggest transition points in the whole Christian story, because in this moment the disciples realize that they have to carry on the mission. They can no longer simply be Jesus' followers, cheering his miracles, listening at his feet. They have to become teachers and leaders themselves. It's up to them to spread the gospel, to share the love of God.

Now Jesus knows that this is a tall order for his motley crew, so he promises them some help. He tells them that God will send an Advocate –

the Holy Spirit – to guide them. And they will know this Spirit, Jesus says, because it abides in them already. It had been there all along.

But they had forgotten. And this is where the gospel parallels Oprah's message. The disciples had forgotten that they had that gift, that capacity within them. And so do we. It is the central tragedy of the human story that we are created in God's image, breathed full of the Holy Spirit, and yet we still believe we are unworthy or unable to give and receive love. That feeling is why Oprah touched so many people over so many years. She spoke the truth about that sense of unworthiness, and she tried to help people combat it by encouraging them to believe in themselves. But it's easier said than done.

Thankfully, today's gospel reminds us that we don't have to do it alone. In fact, one way to understand Jesus' mission – the whole purpose of salvation – is that he is God's response to this problem. God came to live among us in the person of Jesus to remind us who we really are. To reveal to us our true identities, to show us that we are worthy of love and called to love in return. It's a simple and powerful message, a message that with the help of the Holy Spirit has endured not just for 25 years on daytime television but for 2,000 years, as together we strive again and again to become the people we were created to be. Amen.