

May 10, 2026
The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22-31
Psalm 66:7-18
1 Peter 3:13-22
John 14:15-21

A couple of years ago I tried to save a baby bird. I found it along with 3 other hatchlings right beside the church. All four were on the ground. The first three had died...most likely from the fall from their nest. But in the leaves of the daffodils I saw a small movement. And there...trying to scurry away full of fright was the fourth little bird. A little grey and black bird who against all odds, had survived a fall that seemed unsurvivable.

I immediately picked the baby bird up and took it home. He was so scared. I could feel his heart pounding in his little body. He wouldn't eat at first. But after about 12 hours he started to eat. Soon, he wanted to be held. He would close his eyes and sing the most beautiful little songs...simple chirps and trills that said nothing less than thank you. He even liked the dogs...and they liked him...a lot.

But...I am sad to say he didn't make it. After 4 days, whatever injuries his little body had sustained made living just a little too hard. I still get emotional thinking about the miraculous gift of that little bird. For a time we were able to give him safety and assurance, food to eat, and warm hands to hold him.

I wish we had a fairy tale ending. I wanted to set him free to fly away and I held secret hopes that he would come back day after day to our deck to say hello. But life doesn't always turn out like the fairy tale.

Or does it?

Our collect for today says these words...

"Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire..."

Pour into our hearts such love. Let us love you in all things. May we obtain your promises which exceed anything we can ever desire.

Now, to me obtaining God's promises so that they exceed anything we can ever desire seems like a fairy tale. Because when we look at our lives, we can name all kinds of things that did not exceed what we desired. Things go wrong. We lose someone we love. We get sick. We experience all sorts of bumps and bruises and those things surely aren't what we desire. They can make us doubt those promises that we are told we will receive.

Why did you let that happen, God? Where were you?

In those moments it can be hard to believe that God provides anything that reaches beyond what we can desire for ourselves. Because pain and loss certainly don't feel like things that exceed our expectations.

But, maybe, we are misinterpreting what God's provisions for our lives are all about.

Let's consider our texts from John and 1 Peter this morning and try to answer 2 questions...

How does God know what we need and how does God provide for those needs? In other words, what do these promises look like in real time, in real places, to real people?

First...how does God know what we need?

In the Gospel of John, we are told that God will send an advocate to be with us. Other translations refer to this advocate as our Comforter, Counselor, Helper, or Friend. The Greek word is Paraclete...which means the Spirit of God that takes the place of Christ after his ascension to help his followers move into a deeper knowledge of the gospel and to give them strength when they undergo trials and persecutions.

Another way to understand the advocate is simply the Holy Spirit. God with us. Our aide and intercessor. It is God walking with us and knowing very personally our joys and our sorrows. Our hopes and our fears. There is nothing in our lives that is not known by God and experienced by God. God promises that through the advocate, through the Holy Spirit, God will learn what we need and will provide for us from that personal, intimate knowledge.

Second, how does God provide for our needs?

We have a wonderful clue in our text from the first letter of Peter. In this text, Peter makes a beautiful reference to Noah's Ark. But first Peter reminds us that Christ suffered for our sins, was put to death, and made alive in the spirit. (Remember in our reading from John...what is the spirit? Our advocate, our guide...Peter is reinforcing that truth for us). God knows our needs through the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then, we hear the reference to Noah and the Ark...

"...God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few...were saved through water." And then Peter goes on to compare the ark with our baptism.

This is a fantastic parallel! Why? Because Peter is aligning the church and the act of our baptism with the safety of the ark. Like the ark, the church becomes for us a place of refuge and protection, a lifeboat, a shelter in the midst of life's storms. A provision for our needs.

Here's something you might like to know...If you are an architecture buff, what do you call the central aisle of the church?

In traditional church architecture, the central aisle is called the nave (that's where the congregation typically sits). The word nave derives from the Latin, "*navis*" which means...SHIP! So...the nave of the church, especially when churches were designed with vaulted ceilings, are meant to remind us of being in a ship. To remind us of the safety of the ark. Our place of provision to weather the storm. That's beautiful, isn't it?

Frederick Buechner writes about the experience of the ark as the church in his book *Whistling in the Dark*. He writes:

"...Just about everything imaginable is aboard, the clean and the unclean both. They are all piled in together helter-skelter, the predators and the prey, the wild and the tame, the sleek and beautiful ones and the ones that are ugly as sin. There are sly young foxes and impossible old cows.....There are hawks and there are doves....There are times when they all cackle and grunt and roar and sing together, and there are times when you could hear a pin drop. Most of them have no clear idea just where they're supposed to be heading or how they're supposed to get there or what they'll find if and when they finally do, but they figure the people in charge must know and in the meanwhile sit back on their haunches and try to enjoy the ride.

It's not all enjoyable. There's backbiting just like everywhere else. There's a pecking order. There's jostling at the trough. There's growling and grouching and whining....

But even at its worst, there's at least one thing that makes it bearable within, and that is the storm without....And at its best there is, if never clear sailing, shelter from the blast, a sense of somehow heading in the right direction in spite of everything, a ship to keep afloat, and, like a beacon in the dark, the hope of finding safe harbor at last."¹

That's the knowledge and the provision of God for us. We are part of a community, gathered together to weather the storms that life will surely bring us. God has created this place for our comfort and our reassurance. God has given us a place for love to grow, for redemption to flourish, and grace to abound. That's the provision and it will, if we open our hearts to it, exceed all that we can desire.

Amen.

¹ <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2018/8/21/nave>