



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

CANON WENDY CLAIRE BARRIE, CANON FOR INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRIES

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 10, 2026

EZEKIEL 34:1-6; PSALM 115:1-11; 1 PETER 3:13-22; JOHN 14:15-21

ALL SHALL BE WELL

John 14:15-21 [*Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."*]

May 8th is the feast of Julian of Norwich, theologian of the 14th century. She's Richard Rohr's favorite mystic and Amy Frykolhm calls her "a spiritual counselor for the deeply worried"—exactly the sort of person I should be paying attention to right now.

We know very little about her life, not the dates of her birth or her death or even her name were recorded. We call her Julian because that's the name of the church where she lived as an anchoress, from the Greek *anachōrēsis*, meaning to withdraw, one who

withdraws from the world for religious reasons.

Julian might have escaped our notice altogether except that she wrote about an experience she had at age 30, when she was so ill that the curate gave her last rites; as he held a crucifix before her, she had visions of the Passion of Christ. Her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*, is the earliest known manuscript written by a woman in English. A contemporary of Chaucer, Julian wrote at a time when women were forbidden by the Archbishop of Canterbury to teach, and those who wrote religious

texts in English risked being burned at the stake.

When Julian was a child, the Black Death swept through Norwich, a city then second in size only to London, wiping out more than half its population; again and again it returned. She was no stranger to suffering. Julian writes so vividly about motherhood it's easy to imagine she was once married, with children of her own. I wonder whether she watched her family suffer. Soon after her visions, she chose a life of prayer and contemplation, though she didn't enter a convent.

Instead, she became an anchoress. In the ritual that bound her to this lifelong vocation, Julian would have lain on the floor covered in a black pall, heard the funeral rite being said for her, and felt the dust of the earth flung on her as if she were being buried alive. She was walled up inside a stone cell with three small windows, one that looked into the church so she could participate in worship and receive communion, one her servant would use for her food and her waste, and one, always curtained, looked out to the street where she could counsel visitors. There, she wrote about her visions in explicitly feminine language, first right after she experienced them and then over the

course of the next twenty years as she came to understand them.

In a time when the church's teaching centered on God's wrath, sin, punishment, and hell, Julian's theology of hope, mercy, forgiveness, and grace stands apart. Her sixteen visions—Julian calls them showings—reveal God's boundless love for all humanity, and Jesus is to her "our friendly Lord;" she describes him both as brother and mother.

You may know these words of Julian's: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" except it's Jesus who spoke them to her. "Like a fool," Julian writes, "I used to wonder about [sin]. Why wouldn't God, in his omniscience, have prevented sin when he created us?... I know I should have abandoned this disturbing line of thought, but I couldn't seem to help myself. I grieved and lamented this beyond all reason and discretion. But in this showing Jesus gave me all that I needed. "Sin is inevitable," he said, "yet all will be well and all will be well and every kind of thing shall be well."

Julian doesn't leave it there. "As I sat in contemplation of this showing, reflecting broadly, sorrowfully, darkly on its meaning, I felt an upwelling of fear and exclaimed to our Beloved, "Oh,

good Lord, how can all be well? The transgressions of your creatures have caused such harm!”

Jesus told her, “What is impossible for you is not impossible for me. I will keep my word in all things, and I shall make all things well.”

This brings us to the disciples in the upper room after their last supper with Jesus. The floor is still wet from his washing their dirty feet, the strange sign of the new commandment he has given, to love one another as he loves them. That’s hard for them to focus on, knowing that something terrible has been set in motion, one of them will betray him, one of them will deny him... Nothing is well, and Jesus wants to prepare them for what is coming. He starts with what is most important: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

A friend who is a New Testament scholar says that this sentence in Greek expresses a future probability: “When you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

“Keep” in this sense is to guard, to treasure; it is the same word used for Mary who “treasured all these things in her heart.” This love is *agapē*—self-giving; unconditional.

That’s how it is with Jesus. His love is active and relational: he heals people, feeds them, engages with them, weeps with them, comforts them, and restores them. That’s how we are to love one another.

“I am only better if I love God better,” writes Julian. “We are all one in love.”

In the upper room, Jesus says to his disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.” Advocate is literally “the one called alongside.” This is the new way that Jesus will be with the community of believers, this is how God abides with us.

“Christ will never move from the place he takes in our souls,” Julian says. “We are his home of homes, his truest dwelling.”

Jesus in the gospel says something surprisingly tender and intimate: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” Now, listen to Julian: “Christ acts mercifully within us, and the power and the generosity of the Holy Spirit reconciles us to him. This is what makes us all children of a loving God.”

Jesus’s next words to his disciples are confusing. “In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On

that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

Julian understands what Jesus means. She uses an odd word for this indwelling. We are “one-d” with God, she says, “knit into God’s own... one-d with all creation and every soul.”

The gospel concludes, “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Julian writes, “... I saw that every impulse of loving compassion we have toward our fellow human beings is the Christ in us.”

More than fifteen years after her illness, she had a final vision. “Throughout the time of my showings,” Julian writes, “I wished to know what our Beloved meant... This is what I heard: “Love was his meaning. Who revealed this to you? Love. What did he reveal? Love. Why did he reveal it to you? For love... Stay with this, and... you will never know anything but love, without end.”

In our anxiety, in our fears, in our suffering and as we accompany others in their suffering, may we hear Julian and trust Jesus: “All shall be well.”

Amen.

Julian and Mirabai Starr. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*. Hampton Roads Publishing, 2013.



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