

The Coming of the Holy Spirit - The Day of Pentecost

June 4, 2017

Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-11 “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

4 I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you,⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

“An Advocate at All Times”

Now that we have entered into the unofficial start of summer, our attention turns toward the outdoors. You might be camping out on bleachers or the outfield for a significant portion of the summer. Or you might think about how you can get away for a quick camping trip with the family where you can disconnect from all your devices. You might just think about multiple, quick little getaways to explore and enjoy mountains, valleys, monuments and parks.

One writer describes her own outdoor explorations during her awkward teenage years. She was so worried about how silly she would look, she would go exercise outside by herself. At night. In the dark. She didn’t want anyone to know or see her, just in case she looked really silly. Today, she has come to appreciate doing all sorts of adventurous activities with friends. She has embraced trying new things and pushing herself. So she really values different friends or friends who can be there for her in different ways.

One she describes as the ‘You can do it’ friend. This friend is the friend who offers encouragement to someone still a little nervous after recovering from surgery or the new mom who is trying to get back into running. This friend is the voice of a gentle coach and reassuring presence when you are facing an intimidating event.¹ Another friend the author describes is the ‘Push-yourself’ friend. If you go for a 20 minute walk, this friend runs 3 miles. If you run 3 miles, she is competing in a 5k. If you run a 5k she’s running some extreme race over mountains for super-human distances. This friend will help you realize you can keep pushing yourself to do more and try harder. The last one the author describes is the ‘Slow-your-roll’ friend. This friend is stopping to notice the beautiful flowers and camouflaged wildlife while mountain bikers whiz by and runners cruise past with earbuds

¹ Ali Harvey. “Trying Something New Outdoors? Pick the Right Friend.” (C) 2017 Alaska Dispatch Publishing. <https://www.adn.com/outdoors-adventure/2017/05/24/alli-harvey-trying-something-new-outdoors-pick-the-right-friend/> Accessed June 1, 2017.

blaring. This friend helps you slow down and appreciate your activity and everything you can experience while you're doing it.

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, we are reassured that Jesus is our friend. Jesus speaks in John 14 - 17 as a true friend. Jesus is taking some time to fill his disciples with last minute instructions. It is just hours before he is arrested, tried, and tortured before facing excruciating execution. Yet Jesus is the friend who is concerned about others. Jesus knows his disciples will face challenges in life. So he promises disciples will always have a friend at their side. It is true for those 12 Apostles and it is true for us today too. You have an advocate at all times.

Depending on which Bible translation you prefer, the promise Jesus gives is called the "Counselor" (NIV 84) or "Advocate" (NIV2011) or even "Helper" (ESV). The proper name Jesus uses is Paraclete. And it is a difficult name to translate. That's why there are so many possibilities in English. And they are all pretty close. This is the name for the help Jesus promises. This helper will come alongside the person who is lost or struggling. This being will provide counsel and direction, help and advice. You can even think of Him as an Advocate who functions like a lawyer when your back is against the wall. These are all good descriptions for the Holy Spirit Jesus promises to send to us. You are never alone because the Holy Spirit is here for you to help you, to advocate for you in your need, to counsel you in your troubles.

Today we see a prime example of the Holy Spirit's work in Acts chapter 2. The disciples were huddled together in fear. But when sound of a violent wind filled their house and tongues of fire rested on them, they were able to speak about Jesus in all the different languages and dialects of the crowds gathered in Jerusalem for an important festival. And not just whimper out a few words. Peter was able to speak up and speak out boldly after facing some dismissive criticism from the crowds. He spoke boldly and powerfully. And 3,000 souls came to faith on that one day.

Sometimes seeing those powerful displays of disciples witnessing - can I be honest? - make me feel weak by comparison. I understand the instruction Jesus gave those disciples applies to disciples today too. Jesus says disciples ARE witnesses. We know what Jesus expects from all of us. But in reality instead of Pentecost displays of power, we suffer from frequent power outages.

But that was all still in the future when Jesus spoke these words in John chapters 15 and 16. The disciples heard what Jesus expected from them. But they heard something else that devastated them. Jesus told them he was going. He was going away. He was returning to the Father. Have you ever been in a conversation, maybe over the phone, when you heard some bad news? A car crash. A stroke. Your crush says no. And you don't even hear what comes next. Your mind is clouded. Your heart is hurting. You can't possibly process any more information. That's how the disciples felt.

Jesus even recognizes what they are going through. He follows up his bombshell: **"None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have**

said these things.” (John 16:5,6) They have such pain in their hearts that they don’t even have any follow up questions asking for clarification from Jesus about his departure. It’s such a deep anguish. A follow up question would just acknowledge they heard what they actually heard.

Few things are tougher to take than the feeling of abandonment. Just being a Christian can be tough enough. You look around and so many people are just taking the easy way out. Close friends who have essentially made up their own religion. Family members who have given up on the faith. People you used to look up to now compromise their beliefs at every turn. It makes you feel all alone.

Pain can be debilitating. A little pain can be good. It tells you that you are using your muscles. And doctors and trainers will tell you that those tiny rips and slight pains are actually the body’s way of building muscle tissue and getting stronger. But sometimes it can be hard to tell what is normal pain and what is incapacitating pain. One of the biggest myths we often believe about Christianity is that there shouldn’t be any pain. But the probable isn’t the feeling of weakness, pain or defeat. Rather, it’s that we get so fixated on the pain that we become inactive. That’s what happened to those disciples. Sorrow at the departure had so filled their hearts, they was no room to feel anything else.

But there’s a major problem with these painful feelings of abandonment. Jesus gives disciples this message about his departure. He knew it would be tough medicine to swallow. But his words are meant to bring them joy and comfort instead of pain and grief. Jesus says this is actually better for us. Jesus says: **“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”** (John 16:7) Jesus wants you to know you are never alone. No matter how you feel or what things look like, Jesus has never abandoned you. In fact Jesus gives you greater blessings than what you expect you could have if Jesus was right here with you.

That’s where a true friend comes in. A real friend is willing to be honest with you, tell you the truth even if it’s not what you want to hear. A real friend will tell you pain is your body’s message telling you to stop. Or she will tell you the pain is just temporary and the solution is to keep working. Jesus is giving you this kind of friend: **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”** (John 15:26) The Holy Spirit tells you the truth that you were never truly alone, because Jesus was living for you. Jesus was the only one who was ever truly abandoned. And that happened on the cross when he felt the punishing blows inflicted on him for every sinner who has ever lived. He suffered the abandonment of hell so you will never have to know what absolute abandonment feels like.

I think the work of the Holy Spirit has to be one of the most misunderstood teachings in the Bible. And it’s not so much because the Bible is unclear, but because all the noise we hear about the Holy Spirit so often has nothing to do with what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s whole work is to bring you closer to Jesus. Here’s the Comforter to give you the truth that Jesus has done it all for you.

The Holy Spirit is right there with you at all times. Jesus promised it. The Holy Spirit has a job to do for you and for the world. Jesus says: **“When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me.”** (John 16:8,9) There is only one solution to the sin each person accumulates throughout their lifetime. Convicted of sin leads people to repent and find forgiveness in Jesus. But if they reject Jesus, if they refuse to believe in him, then they will remain in their sin. The Holy Spirit is more than a ‘You can do it’ friend. He isn’t just coaching you to be better and get out there and chase your dreams.

That’s because the Holy Spirit doesn’t just visit us, he comes to live in us. The Holy Spirit is the one who delivers God’s gifts, God’s power, God’s light and God’s comfort to our hearts. But that’s not enough for God’s people. He doesn’t function as that ‘Push yourself’ friend to motivate you to try harder, because the Comforter works in you and through you. The Holy Spirit enters into your heart through faith in Jesus. He makes his people not just servants but also temples in which he constantly serves us.

Life is painful, we face setbacks and defeats. Through it all, your Advocate is right there with you. You might have a good friend who helps you slow down and take note of everything going on around you so you can appreciate what you have. The Comforter sent by Jesus goes one step farther. The Holy Spirit points out what you already have in Jesus Christ. You have the righteousness of Jesus throughout all of your challenges and trials in life. You have the victory of Jesus achieved at the cross and empty grave over your soul’s greatest enemies.

Right now the NBA and NHL finals are going on. For all the players on each team, the season has been going on a long time before they even started the playoffs. These months of competition can take their toll on their bodies. But the excitement of reaching the championship fuels them to press on and continue.

So many times we feel weak and worn out in our faith. But right now you live in the power and strength of a true companion, the best friend. It’s not because we’ve advanced to a level where we don’t need Jesus any more. Actually, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, your Advocate works to bring you closer to Jesus every day. By sending the Holy Spirit, he tells you He is up for your challenges. Amen.