

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This 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.

¹⁸“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They 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.”

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

In today’s sermon, we have to put on our thinking caps. We have to learn some Greek and Hebrew. We have to think about the Trinitarian formula of one God in three forms. We have to get a little nerdy.

Chronologically, we have just jumped back in time to hear words that Jesus spoke before the events of Holy Week. He has gathered his followers – just his followers, not the crowds, not the religious authorities, just his dearest friends – and he is saying goodbye. Scholars call this section of John the Farewell Discourse. It is five chapters long. The longest single conversation or speech in all of the Bible.

And that’s understandable. If you were God on earth, and you were about to suffer what Jesus suffered, and disappear for many hours, and then reappear only to leave again, wouldn’t you want to speak to your family and friends and tell them all that is on your heart and mind? Wouldn’t you want to leave instruction about how to continue the work that you started? Give them some encouragement? Offer them words of love?

This week and next week we will hear portions of Jesus' Farewell. Today, we have a promise.

Jesus says that when he leaves, there will be "another Advocate" coming from God. And that is the gift that changes the course of the entire world. I mean, losing Jesus is devastating, but Jesus says, "you won't be orphaned, another is coming" And that is the best news.

The first thing I want to point out is that Jesus uses the word "another" to describe what is to come. He is not saying that something new is coming. He is reminding them that He has come, and soon, another will come, from the same source - God. Jesus, Immanuel, God with Us, has already come from heaven to earth and lived among us. Now that he is returning to God, another is coming from God.

But who is coming? And what does this "being" do? In the translation I read, the name for the one who is coming is "Advocate." But in your favorite Bible, it might say Comforter, or Helper, Consoler, Defender, Supporter.

But more importantly than how we name it now, is how it was named back then. In the original Greek, the word is *paraclete*.

This is a combination of two words *para* which means beside or alongside and *kalein* which means to call. So, a *paraclete* is one that is called alongside. In legal terms, a defense lawyer is one who is called alongside to provide advocacy and support in court. And so, it gets translated in English as Advocate, but we're not just talking about the justice system here!

We're talking about a companion that will be close to us, at our side, through thick and thin. Jesus was limited in his physical body to be in one place at a time. Nazareth, the edge of the Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem, but the one who Jesus promises has the ability to be near to all of us, all the time. No more tactile limitations on God's presence with us. Spirit can be alongside all of us, all the time!

And the famous English preacher Charles Spurgeon, who arguably was the most important preacher of the 1800s said the paraclete, the one who comes alongside, is essentially doing two things. First, the paraclete is *called* to. We cry out for God's help – the Spirit comes. We need a comforter, or a Helper – Spirit is by our side. We call out to this promised one.

Second, the paraclete is *calling* to – calling to us. Encouraging us to step out and take risks. Challenging us to love more radically. Daring us to follow. The promised one is calling to us.

This all reminds me of another Disney reference. Last week, I mentioned Frozen 2 from 2019. Today, I remember a character from earlier times. The 1940 classic, Pinocchio. Do we remember Jiminy Cricket? The walking, talking, dapperly dressed insect who is tasked with being Pinocchio's conscience?

For the longest time, I always associated the Holy Spirit with Jiminy Cricket. Trying his best to teach the wooden boy right from wrong and get him to make wise decisions without being able to physically force him to do anything. Spirit was like that – bouncing along with me as I was tempted by this and that thing. Trying to keep me safe and sound. Frustrated. Ready to quit at some points, but loyal, and determined, and with me to the end.

Then, there is the matter of how we recognize this other paraclete. Jesus says, the world will not see or know this one, but the paraclete will be in you. This naturally makes us think of our breath – the air we breathe is not visible, but within us. At Pentecost, the Spirit comes like a rushing wind. In John's Gospel, as we will read in just two weeks, Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples. Spirit is like breath itself.

And that reminds me that throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, four hundred times in fact, we find the word *ruach* which means "wind," "breath," or "spirit". It signifies the animating, life-giving force of God, or the human spirit. It represents an invisible, powerful essence that sustains life and signifies God's presence.

Ruach and paraclete are, in this pastor's mind, one and the same. Ruach in the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, is powerful, cosmic, and dramatic. Ruach is what hovered over the waters at creation in Genesis 1. It is the wind in Exodus 10 that swept through Egypt during the plagues. It is the breath that enters into the dry bones in Ezekiel. Ruach is the Spirit of God, the wind, the breath.

Ruach is the breath of Almighty God; paraclete is the breath within your very lungs.

Ruach who hovered over creation becomes the Paraclete who hovers over the creation of the Christian church.

Ruach who filled prophets with courage and truth becomes the Paraclete who fills the Apostles with courage and truth.

Ruach who revived dry bones becomes the Paraclete who brings resurrection life into fearful, persecuted believers.

Ruach who empowered Israel's leaders becomes the Paraclete who empowers the church for witness.

Ruach is cosmic and powerful in the Old Testament. Paraclete is intimate and personally inspiring in the New Testament.

We need Ruach to stir us. We need Paraclete to steady us.

Reverend Spurgeon says that the coming of the paraclete is the one and only reason that the early church did not fail. He says essentially, Jesus was not just the Messiah, he was the wisdom and power and strength that everyone else clung to. The disciples – Peter and James and Andrew and Matthew – they could not have kept the Jesus movement alive on their own. The success of their efforts is entirely because the Spirit came to them and walked alongside them. Just as if Jesus were there, but better, because Spirit could be in Jerusalem and Turkey and Greece and Rome and Ethiopia all at the same time.

Spurgeon goes on to say, the Spirit “has come down from heaven, and has never gone back again; [the Spirit] dwells in [the] church perpetually, and is not to be brought [back and forth] from on high.”

Jesus is not physically here on earth, but the paraclete is here with us constantly! There is no absence of the Spirit’s presence, only our overlooking of it.

If Jesus were to walk into our sanctuary today, everything would be turned upside down. There would be tears of joy, hugs, questions to ask, thanksgiving to express. And yet, the Spirit is here, among us, invisible, yes, but mysteriously right beside us, as Jesus has promised. We neglect Spirit. Spirit normally gets just one Sunday a year to be the center of attention – Pentecost, which is in two weeks. Today we have doubled the number of Sundays of devotion to and study of the Spirit. And we are just getting started.

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber reminds us, “The first story in the Bible does not say “Let *me* make humankind in my own image, but let *us* make humankind in *our own* image according to *our* likeness” This is not a “me” God, but a “we” God. God from the beginning is plural - God in relationship with others. God as community. In the Beginning is the Creator, the Word and the Spirit all co-mingling to bring forth creation.

Whatever names we choose to use: Father, Son and Holy Ghost; Holy Parent, Holy Child and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer and Advocate; the three aspects have been working together from the beginning to create a beautiful world in which we are in relationship with one another and with the Divine.

This may be super controversial, but God’s pronouns are not he/him. They’re they/them. God is three in one, and we are made in the image of God – called to be in relationship with one another, to walk alongside one another, just as the paraclete is beside us always and forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.