

JESUS IS ON OUR SIDE

John 14:15-21

Messiah Confirmation Sunday

May 6, 2012

Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

There is the story about the person who said to another one day, “Hey, I want you to know that I stood up for and defended you the other day.” “Really?” responded the other person, “How did you do that?” “Well, I was with some people and they said that you aren’t fit to eat with the pigs and I said, ‘Oh yes you are!’” As they say with friends like that who needs enemies?

It is so important to have people around us who are on our side—who are there to stand behind us, to defend us, to advocate for us, to pray for us, to support us. It is so important to have people around us who we can trust—those who truly care; who can lovingly correct us when we are out of line; who can weep with us when we weep and rejoice with us when we rejoice.

Pastor Ben Patterson in a “*Leadership Magazine*” article says that every Christian, as well as every Christian leader, needs an Aaron and Hur in their lives. You may remember that these were the two men who held up the arms of Moses as the Israelites battled the Amalekites in Exodus 17. When Moses’ arm and staff were up the Israelites were winning the war, but whenever it would come down they would be losing. Moses needed Aaron & Hur.

In order for us to live for Jesus and to follow God’s call to make a difference in this world on behalf of the Gospel we all need people to pray for us, to stand behind us, to advocate for us, to encourage us to stay strong. That is an important message for you Confirmants as well as for each one of us—for none of us can do it alone.

In our Gospel lesson from John 14 Jesus promises that he will give those of us who love him two very important things. First of all he promises that he will give us the Advocate, his Spirit of truth, to be with us forever. Secondly he promises that because he lives we will also live.

The message of this passage, I believe, is that Jesus has promised to be on our side. The good news is that he is working each day on our behalf and that he wants to give each one of us the gift of his abundant life in all its fullness.

And to assure us of these promises Jesus says he will send us the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who will abide with us and in us. Jesus promises that he will not leave us alone, he will not leave us orphaned, but will live in you and me through his Holy Spirit.

Now the Holy Spirit, according to the Bible, is that power and presence of God who is active in our lives each day. The Holy Spirit is that power that tugs at our hearts calling us to believe and trust in Jesus; that power that works with our conscience reminding us of what is moral, right and true; that presence that helps us know and feel Christ’s love and joy in our hearts.

The Bible often refers to the Holy Spirit with words like defender, helper, life breath, intercessor, comforter, advocate, shield, protector. Jesus’ gift of the Holy Spirit shows that God is on our side—that he loves each one of us very deeply.

This gift means that Jesus is going to do everything he can to keep us close to him each day of our lives. He is present with us in order to help us rise above the problems and evils of this world and to give us a life that is rich in the fullness of his love and care.

In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is there to help us in our weaknesses for he says that we do not even know how to pray as we ought. Paul also says that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us—in other words he takes our mixed up and feeble words in our prayers, he brings them to Jesus and advocates on our behalf. Jesus appeals to God's love and mercy for you and for me.

My friends, Jesus is definitely on our side—cheering us on, grieving when we turn from him and go our own way and yet rejoicing when we follow him each day. Jesus' will for you and me, and his greatest joy, is if we receive his promises by faith.

His greatest joy is if we dedicate our lives to him, follow his commands, and if we share in his wonderful grace and forgiveness. Jesus said, *"I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."* That is God's will for you and me.

Now the truth, of course, is that as Christ sent his Holy Spirit to advocate for us that he, in turn, calls us to be advocates and to bring the love of Jesus to others. He calls us to affirm, encourage, stand behind, and defend others in their daily walk of faith. He calls us to allow his Holy Spirit to shine through us in all of our words and deeds.

And yet this, unfortunately, is often where the breakdown occurs. We often forget to take the time to advocate for and help our Christian brothers and sisters. Sometimes, sad to say, we put others down and criticize them rather than seeking to lift them up. Sometimes we let people stand all alone in the midst of temptation or times they mess up. When the going gets tough we are nowhere to be found in standing behind them.

Author and pastor Charles Swindoll, in his book *"It's Time To Laugh Again,"* says that one of the problems is that those of us who tend to be perfectionists or high achievers are often very hard on ourselves. Our lives are often dominated by shoulds, and ought-tos, and musts.

Even though we may know intellectually that our salvation rests only on God's grace—that as Ephesians states we are saved only by God's grace through faith—we still may feel we need to do more to earn God's favor. We may feel deep inside that we haven't done enough.

The result, according to Swindoll, is that then we perfectionists and high achievers often have a difficult time being tolerant of others who don't live up to our expectations. We like to sit in judgment and want them to live their lives flawlessly even if we know that our own lives are anything but flawless.

Christians are often judgmental and hard on others for the imperfections we see in ourselves. And what can easily happen, says Swindoll, is that we, you and me, can easily become present day legalists—we can become grace and joy killers.

It is amazing how easily we who claim to be Christians, and our churches, can kill the very heart of Jesus' love and Gospel. And the really sad thing is how we also easily rationalize and convince ourselves that we are right and following God's word. And yet we need to realize that being a grace and joy killer is never part of God's plan.

The Apostle Paul in the New Testament was one who in his former life was the ultimate high achiever of his day. He could have won any award for his accomplishments—he was the perfect example of church attendance, tithing, living a moral life, knowing the Bible by memory, etc.

And yet in his conversion to Christianity on the Road to Damascus he proclaimed that all the righteous things he had done, all his great intellect and theology, were nothing more than filthy rags. Paul said that he counted everything as loss in view of knowing the love, the mercy, and the grace of Jesus Christ his Lord and Savior.

It was then that the Apostle Paul began to look at others through the eyes of his own sinful and fallen nature. As he had been touched by God's grace and forgiveness Paul began to share God's grace and love with others.

And as a result Paul became a vehicle of the Holy Spirit through his love and encouragement of others. He accepted the fact that no one, and no church, is or ever will be perfect. He pointed in his words and messages to Christ's love and forgiveness, and he affirmed and celebrated each person's growth in faith. Paul became one who passed on life rather than taking it away.

It has been said that it takes ten words of affirmation to make up for one person saying, "You dummy!" That is why church arguments and divisions can be so destructive. And that is why cyber bullying through texting or Facebook can be so hurtful to people of all ages.

It is so important that we be like Jesus and that the Holy Spirit lives in us—for then with God's power we will affirm and encourage others in their daily walk and challenges of life/faith; we will build people up rather than tear them down; we will always look for the positive and God given gifts in people rather than the negatives.

Today as we celebrate Confirmation it is so important for us as family members and friends to encourage and support our youth. Youth today so often feel that they are accepted mostly for what they do, for how they look, for how popular they are, etc. We need to give them grace, affirmation, encouragement and hope as they go through these challenges of growing up.

And that is one of my major goals for our church here at Messiah—that this church is always a welcoming, encouraging, and life affirming place to be. I want this church to be Spirit-filled, to be filled with Jesus' grace and love, to be a place where no perfect people are allowed. May we be a place that brings grace and joy to everyone who enters here.

I close with a story. There was an older man out walking one day with his young granddaughter. "How far are we from home?" the man asked the girl. "Grandpa I don't know." A bit later the man asked again, "Do you know where you are right now?"

Again the girl answered, "I have no idea where we are." The grandfather then said in a teasing way, "Then we must be lost." "Oh no, Grandpa," said the girl, "I can't be lost. I'm with you."

Ultimately this is the assurance that we share as believers in Jesus Christ—that we are not lost and alone—rather Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit to be with us always; that the Holy Spirit is our advocate; and that Jesus is on our side seeking to give us life in abundance.

May each one of us, you and me, claim this gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May we trust in Jesus with our whole heart through faith and allow him to work in us. And then may we, as his people, be advocates, encouragers, and life-givers to one another.