



SERMON

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

John 14:23-29

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Skyline Presbyterian Church

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

John tells us that Jesus will send us a living presence as a “Counselor” and as “the Holy Spirit.” The technical term translated “counselor” is the word “paraclete.” It is probably a word with which you are not entirely familiar. Paraclete is not parakeet. Paraclete is not a bird. It is a rather esoteric word. It is a technical term found mostly in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John. We read only a portion of that chapter this morning, but the word “paraclete” appears there several times.

It’s one of the Greek words we aren’t sure we know how to translate into English. It’s translated a number of ways: comforter, counselor, advocate, and a couple of other words as well. In the text that I read to us this morning the word used is “counselor.” Jesus says, *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all these things.* In other translations of that passage the word is, “advocate.” If you are familiar with the King James Version, you know the King James translation doesn’t say “counselor,” it says “comforter.” In the Revised King James version it says, “helper.”

No matter how we translate “paraclete,” what is being said is that when Jesus told His followers that He was going to leave them, He promised they would not be alone.

This is made all the more poignant because, as Jews, they believed that God is good and that God is in control of history. If God is in charge of history, how come these evil Romans seem to be in charge of history? If God is in charge, why does Jesus tell them He will leave them?

Often I edit my sermon on a Saturday. What I thought was brilliant on Thursday needs a lot of help as I re-read it Saturday afternoons. I choose that time of day because I can trust I won’t be disturbed. One Saturday the doorbell rang.

A ringing doorbell is not a happy sound to one who stays at home to be undisturbed. I opened the door and discovered two women standing there, nicely dressed, holding clipboards. “We would like to ask you some questions and discuss with you matters of great significance?”

Well that got my attention since I, too, am in a business that discusses matters of great significance. So I said, “Sure, fire away.”

They said, “Have you noticed all the news about the earthquakes and the volcanoes erupting all around the world?”

I asked them, “Where are you from anyway?”

They said, “We’re Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

I said, “Well, I’m a Presbyterian minister.”

I waited for their reaction, expecting them to scurry for cover. It didn’t even faze them. They replied, “Do you know what the Bible says about all these events that are happening in our world today?”

Well that is exactly the question that the first Christians asked, and turned to apocalypse to find the answer. The answer of apocalypse is the time is coming when the Lord will return and defeat all His enemies, and punish the evil ones, and reward the good ones. Apocalypse was not written to predict the future. It was not written in the first century to predict events in the 21st century. That is where the ladies with the clipboards got it wrong. Apocalypse is a word of hope. It says God wins, love wins, and there’s work to do in the world right now. It is not ours to worry about. Our assignment is to serve Christ; to represent Christ to others in such a way that we are re-presenting Him to them. God has the church, body of Christ, for His mission in the world. We’re it.

In this time between Christ’s ascension and His coming again, we have been promised the paraclete. *I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you an Advocate [Counselor, Comforter, Helper], to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth.*

These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John’s gospel was the last one to be written, around 100 A.D. Which means that those to whom the gospel was addressed had been waiting seventy years for Jesus to return. Now it was apparent that He was not returning within their lifetime.

What was apparent to the Christians was that they had to live day by day with all the dangers and difficulties of this life. It was no longer sufficient to say to them, “Just hold on, Jesus is coming soon.” Jesus was not coming, not for a long, long time. As He told us, *Nobody knows the hour or the day; only the Father knows.*

I will send the paraclete to be with you forever. I don’t think we’re supposed to wait for someone to come and rescue us. I think we are supposed to keep on going. And when we do, we will find there is Someone who walks with us. Not to rescue us, but to guide us. Not to save us, but to strengthen us, to give us peace.

Let me illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit by sharing with you a short story from Robert Drake. Robert Drake is a Tennessean who writes stories about growing up in that part of the country a generation ago. He tells a story about Miss Caroline Walker, who was a music teacher. She had been doing it for as long as anybody could remember. She was something of a legend in her county in Tennessee.

She had two goals in teaching. One was to teach her girls to be ladies. So she taught them manners as much as she taught them music. She also taught them to play one piece perfectly for the May recital. She rehearsed them and drilled them all year long to play that one piece perfectly, including instructions on how to sit on the piano bench, to spread your skirt as you sit down, and how to announce the song by standing straight and holding your hands together at your waist.

The night of the recital came. It was held in the high school auditorium. Ten pupils of Miss Caroline's were there waiting for their turn. Ann Louise's turn came. She was terrified. She thought she was going to faint. She knew she would never make it, but it was her turn, so she moved forward to the wings where Miss Caroline was waiting.

Miss Caroline could see how nervous Ann Louise was. Her body had become stiff and rigid. She put her hands on Ann Louise's shoulders, and bent down to whisper in her ear, "You have worked hard. You know this piece. You have nothing to fear. And remember, I am counting with you all the way."

With a little shove she pushed Ann Louise out onto the stage where, all of a sudden, she was facing this large audience of everybody's relatives, including her own. She announced her piece, then spread her skirt, and sat on the bench. She noticed that she was much calmer than she thought she would be. She noticed that Miss Caroline was still there in the wings. She remembered the last words that she said to her, "I am counting with you all the way." She didn't say, "I am counting on you." She said, "I am counting with you."

And Drake wrote this. "She felt that they were held together by something beyond either of them alone. Teacher and disciple were as one. She realized that it was this that she had been preparing for all year long, this test. And the music, at her command, came cascading out of the baby grand into the darkened auditorium full of joy and full of life, right on cue."

Jesus tells us that *the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

The Holy Spirit is like Miss Caroline. The Holy Spirit gets us ready, teaches us, reminds us of Christ's truths, gifts us for service in His name and then....gives us a shove to get on out there. Remember, the Holy Spirit will be counting with us all the way.