

The World's Best Counselor

Pentecost Sun. – 06/05/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: John 14:23-31 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 26-27a [Jesus says to His disciples] **“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.”**

Introduction

✘ New Testament scholar Gordon Fee once shared a remark that one of his students made to him about the Holy Spirit. The student said, “God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me, and God the Son I can quite understand; but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur” (*God's Empowering Presence*, © 1994).

➔ Why did he say, “Gray”? I don't know. And why “oblong”? I have no idea. And yet, to some extent, I think most of us still get what he's saying. We believe in the Holy Spirit. We know that He lives in us through faith in Jesus Christ. We confess that He is with us right here, right now, and every time we gather together around Word and Sacrament. But it's pretty hard to picture or even describe this Divine being Whom we also sometimes call “the Holy Ghost”. How are we supposed to picture a “ghost,” much less a “Holy Ghost”?

✘ And to be honest, the Bible doesn't explain the Holy Spirit in a way that is abundantly clear. In a sense, it gives us too much help because there are so many different and contrasting pictures of the Spirit in God's Holy Word. The Spirit appears as a dove; then as tongues of fire; then again, as a loud, rushing wind; in other places as a quiet whisper. It's enough to make you ask, “Will the real Holy Spirit please stand up?”

➔ On the other hand, the Bible does provide some very clear and helpful information – divine teaching – about who the Spirit is and what He does for us as Christians. Over and over again in the Gospel of John, such as here in our text from John 14, Jesus uses a very unique word to describe the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word is *paraklētos* (παράκλητος), which literally means “one who is called to stand by one's side”. This word is translated in a number of different ways in the English versions of the Bible: “Helper,” “Advocate,” “Comforter,” or “Counselor”. Jesus says in verses 25-26, “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you”. “But the Helper [the Comforter, the Counselor], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will 1) teach you all things and 2) bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”.

➔ In verse 28 Jesus reminds the disciples, “I am going away”. And in verse 27, “Let not your hearts be troubled”. Why? How can He assure them of His peace? Because He says He is leaving behind for them and for Christians of all times and in all places a Helper, a Comforter, a full-time, free-of-charge Counselor – the Holy Spirit. And this Holy Spirit is “The World's Best Counselor”.

➔ So, every faithful Christian wants to know, “What does this good ‘Counselor’ do? What does the Holy Spirit, do for us, and how does He do it?”

I. Holy Spirit counsels by convicting us of sin.

✘ According to Jesus, in John 16:8, one of the most important things the Holy Spirit does as our Counselor is a rather unpleasant thing. He counsels us by convicting us of our sin. “When He comes,” Jesus says, “He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

- He uses His own Word in Scripture to confront us with those secret or not-so-secret areas of our lives that do not please our heavenly Father; that tear down rather than build up our brothers and sisters in Christ; that damage our witness for Christ, that hurt us – preventing us from enjoying the blessings that come when we willingly and joyfully obey God’s commandments.
- ✘ Although He is God, this is not an easy job for the Holy Spirit. It’s not hard for Him to keep track of all our sins; He is, remember, one person in the all-seeing, all-knowing God. What’s hard about it is that the Spirit has to deal constantly with hardheaded people like you and me; who rebel against the idea of ever acknowledging our guilt and our sin.
- Eldon Weisheit was a longtime LCMS pastor and author who wrote some great books for and about kids, including several volumes of children’s sermon ideas for pastors. In one of those books, Pastor Weisheit describes one of the first children’s sermons he ever attempted as a pastor. With children gathered around him, he held up pieces of paper with various words written on them and asked the children to raise their hands if they thought the words applied to them. He held up words like “short,” “tall,” “smart,” “strong,” “popular,” “handsome,” “pretty,” and so on, and each time at least some of the children raised their hands. Then he held up the word “sinner” and waited ... and waited, until finally one youngster in the front row took hold of his little brother’s hand and lifted it high into the air.
- We can’t help but laugh at that cute story, because we know full well that it’s not just children who are anxious to point a finger at somebody else.
- ✘ In another story a woman came to her counselor confessing, or complaining that she just didn’t feel she was growing in her spiritual life. When he asked her what she thought the problem might be, she immediately proceeded to tick off about a dozen reasons, all of which put the blame squarely on the shoulders of somebody else. “The pastor’s sermons don’t speak to me; the style of worship isn’t the way I’d like it to be; people at church are so unfriendly; my husband doesn’t support me; my children don’t behave the way they should,” and on and on. Finally the counselor took a deep breath, prayed a silent prayer, looked the woman in the eye and asked, “Have you ever considered the possibility that the main problem in your spiritual life might not be the pastor, the people at church, your husband, or your children? Have you ever considered the possibility that the problem might have something to do with you?”
- The best counselors I know have been people who’ve cared enough about me that they have dared to speak the truth in love and respect, even when they knew the truth would likely hurt, like a file or a stone must work to sharpen or hone a blade to do the work God has made it to do.
- ✘ According to the Bible, we can actually help the Holy Spirit with His job as Convicter. Now, let me be clear: we cannot and did not in any way help the Holy Spirit bring us to faith in Christ. Dead people can’t help anyone with anything, and Ephesians 2:5 clearly says that “we were dead in our trespasses” before the Holy Spirit alone “made us alive” through Word and Sacrament.
- But now – now that the Spirit has brought us to life and has come to live in us, we can strive to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16); to keep in step with the Spirit. How? Let me suggest five ways: 1) By seeking to remain open at all times to the Spirit’s loving admonition and exhortation; 2) By opening up the Bible daily so that He can speak to us through the Word and show where and how we need to repent and amend our sinful ways; 3) By coming faithfully to God’s house to hear God’s holy Word proclaimed and taught; 4) By refusing to argue with God when He clearly shows us where we need to confess and amend our sinful lives; 5) By remembering that before we can help get the splinter out of somebody else’s eye, we must, as Jesus said in Mat. 7:3-5, get that log out of our own eye first. Admit it, most of us are pretty good at spotting other people’s sins. It’s our own sins we have trouble seeing and confronting.

II. Holy Spirit counsels by comforting us in Christ.

✘ Fortunately, convicting us of our sins and then working to sharpen and hone the blades of our faith is not the Holy Spirit's only job as our Counselor. In fact, it's not even His most important job. After all, even the devil knows how to accuse people of being sinners. The name Satan actually means "The Accuser". That's why we Lutherans have long said that this convicting or accusing role of the Spirit is His "strange" or "alien" work. The Spirit's true or proper work is not to convict but to comfort us with the Gospel; with the Good News of our forgiveness in Christ – something the devil would never do and cannot do.

➔ According to the Bible, the Spirit convicts us not just to make us feel guilty but to lead us to true repentance; to prepare our hearts to hear and believe the comforting assurance of our forgiveness because of what our Savior has done for us. As I said, a common translation for the "Paraklete" is to call Him the "Counselor" or "Comforter". In fact that describes well the Holy Spirit's ultimate mission and goal: to convince us and to keep on reminding us that although we are poor, miserable sinners, God still loves us more than we can possibly imagine and He delights in calling us as His dear children in Jesus. The Spirit always points to Jesus!

✘ But how does He do His work as our Comforter and Counselor? There are countless ways that He works, since He is God after all. But some of the most common ways are this: 1) He speaks to us through the Scriptures and tells us that, because of what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross, our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12), that though our sins are like scarlet, we have been made as white as snow (Is. 1:18) through the precious blood of Jesus. 2) The Holy Spirit also speaks through the pastor, who has been called by God to say to those with humble and repentant hearts: "I forgive you all your sins," not by my power, not by my authority, not by any special holiness in me, but "in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ" whom I serve on your behalf. 3) The Holy Spirit also comforts us daily as we claim the promises God made to us at our Baptism in the name of the Triune God; as we witnessed today in Gary's baptism and 4) He comforts us by feeding us the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins.

➔ And there is still one more way the Holy Spirit comforts us that should not be overlooked or underestimated. The Spirit also comforts us through one another, as we speak to each other the words of forgiveness that Christ has spoken to us. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God". Even with all these other ways of receiving God's forgiveness, to many of us there's something special about receiving the assurance of that forgiveness through the lips of another human being – especially someone close to us – through the lips of a wife or husband, father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister or Christian friend.

✘ An older pastor shared that he grew up on a vegetable farm in Ohio. It was a family farm in the broadest sense of the term: grandma and grandpa, aunts and uncles and cousins all worked on the farm, and they all lived together in a huge farmhouse. As you might imagine, that kind of life and living situation had its share of tensions. But this very pious Slovak Lutheran family had a beautiful tradition that helped keep tensions from growing into divisions. Each Communion Sunday, before they left for church, the family would gather together in a circle around the big kitchen table and hold hands. Then each member of the family, starting with the oldest and going all the way down to the youngest, would ask for forgiveness for any hurtful words or sinful actions during the week, and then each one would also say, from the youngest to the oldest, "I forgive you in Jesus' name". Then they would leave for church to receive with joy the body and

blood of their Savior and to sit at the feet of their divine Counselor, the Holy Spirit. This is why we pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us," just before we receive the Sacrament.

- ✘ So much more could be said about the counseling ministry of the Holy Spirit: we could talk about how He prays for us with groans and sighs too deep for words, and how He teaches us to pray to our dear Father in heaven. We could talk about how He counsels us to know right from wrong and to discern God's will for our lives; how He helps us to grow up in our faith, so that we can move from the milk to the meat of God's Word; how He gives us gifts to use in service to others and how He empowers us to be Christ's witnesses; how He guards and protects us against the evil one and keeps us strong in the faith until the Last Day.

→ All of these other works of the Holy Spirit are based on and grow out of the Spirit's dual work as Convicter and Comforter. If we ever deny and forget that we are sinners, we might as well forget everything else we've learned about God and about the Christian faith, because, as 1 John 1:8 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us". On the other hand, if we poor, miserable sinners ever stop believing that we are forgiven, we might as well stop believing everything else, because if God's message of forgiveness is a lie, then how can we believe anything else He tells us in His Word? If we can't be sure that we are forgiven, what does it matter what we do?

Conclusion

- ✘ So, the Holy Spirit's job is to make sure, first, that we never forget that we are sinners, and second, that we never stop believing that we are God's precious, holy, forgiven children through the life and death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.
- ✘ This is why Jesus promises in our text today that the Father will send the Spirit, in His name (v.26) as our "Helper". Because we need Him every single day!
 - We need Him to hold us accountable to our struggle with temptation and sin. AND we need His powerful and saving gift of forgiveness and faith.
- ✘ Knowing that He has been "called along beside us" in our baptism means that you and I have now received Jesus' gift of eternal peace. So friends, open your ears of faith right now and hear Jesus say to you personally and all together, "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" (v. 27). You have the Holy Spirit always! Amen.