

23.5.21

### **Helper, Comforter, Counsellor and Advocate**

Birthdays are important events. One of the good things about Facebook is that it alerts you to when it's your friend's birthday. Otherwise I would most likely forget, and a Happy Birthday to those who have celebrated a birthday recently.

Today is the birthday of the Church, and our focus today is on the one who gave birth to the church – the Holy Spirit – God's gift to us – without the Holy Spirit there would be no church and the disciples would have gone home their separate ways and ended up disillusioned and disappointed - nothing to celebrate!

But Jesus was as good as his promise, and in our reading today from John 15:26, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples, he is in the centre of them telling them some meaty things about his departure and how they will have to cope.

He tells them that they will be hated by everyone. *“If the world hated you, keep in mind that they first hated me.”* v18. *“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you”* v20

What is it like to be hated!

Jesus, our leader, knew that only too well and he felt responsible for those who were following after him and who would undergo the heat of trial.

Discipleship was not going to be easy for them, in fact quite the opposite, he is telling them....*expect opposition. Expect to be hated!*

I can remember when I committed my life to Jesus, some wise person put their hand on my shoulder and said, don't expect everyone to be happy for you.

In light of his predictions about persecution, Jesus promises to send them his Spirit.

That is what our reading is about this morning....

<sup>26</sup> “When the Advocate (Paraclete) 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.<sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

Our new moderator – Jim Wallace, wrote some words about this verse which I found very helpful when preparing the sermon, and in fact his words guided me to develop a sermon around it.

He wrote, “ What I found striking in verse 26, is that there are many different names given to the Holy Spirit (Paraclete) in different translations: Helper, Comforter, Counsellor, Advocate, Paraclete: all words which would convey to the disciples the sense that the Spirit would be alongside them, prompting them, supporting them and empowering them. They are called to speak about Jesus, through the power of the Spirit, and within a very short time, on the day of Pentecost, Peter was doing just that (Acts 2: 22-36).

But the Spirit is not confined by time or place. It can empower us today to speak about Jesus and God’s love revealed through His life, death, and resurrection. But we will only do so with conviction if we have set our hearts and minds on knowing Him and wanting others to know him too.”

So, I would like us to focus this morning, for a few moments, on the different translations of the word Paraclete – Paraclete is the Greek word that is used to describe the work of God's spirit here and the problem is that we don't have one precise word in English to translate this word and so different translators have used different words for the work of the Spirit that Jesus sends. Willie Barclay writes, “Clearly this is a difficult word to translate. We shall come to see that the difficulty lies in the fact that the word means so much that there is no single English word by which it can be adequately translated.”

So, today in this Holy Spirit day, let us consider some of these words that will help us understand the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paraclete is translated: Helper, Comforter, Counsellor, Advocate.

### **Firstly, He will send the Spirit to be our helper.**

“With a little help from my friends” goes the Beatles song. We all need a helper. I love the story of the paralysed man being helped through the roof by his friends to meet with Jesus.

My mother has struggled with Parkinsons for some years now and as she journeys with her unwanted visitor, she finds life becoming incredibly

difficult and many things that just a few years ago, she would have taken for granted have become a struggle, and if you have been there or know of someone going through these challenges in life, then you will know how much they need help.

The doctor said a wise thing to my mum: that the different aids that can be given to her, were not to take away her independence but to increase it. The different supports have become a helper to my mum. In her difficult times, she can find help and strength from the different resources that are available.

Jesus reassures the disciples that when he goes away, he is not leaving them alone but he will send his Spirit which will be their helper.

Before they can become great missionaries and church planters, they need to know that God is with them and that he is their help.

The psalmist wrote, "God is my refuge and my help a strength in times of trouble."

Do you look on God to be your helper?

Pentecost is a time to remember that God has sent his Spirit to be our helper in times of need. Maybe today, we need to reach out and receive God's help for our lives.

### **Secondly, he will send the Spirit to be their comforter.**

One of the great blessings that I have in my life is my grandchildren. Four of them! But each one of them has had a love affair with their shawl. A hand knitted woollen shawl created by their great grandmother. For the first few years of their lives, the shawl has been a constant friend. If they left it behind somewhere, then we would need to retrace our footsteps to find the shawl.

What was it in this woollen shawl?

I think it was simply comfort. Infants needed a comforter, something that is warm and wrapped around them, giving them assurance.

Jesus said that he was sending his Spirit of Comfort. Now that in itself is a wonderful message for Pentecost. When he said those words, they were going to be bereft of him. He was going to die on a cross and be resurrected

and taken into heaven. He was going to be taken from them and they needed a comforter.

Jesus was sending the Holy Spirit to come and wrap them in the comfort of God. He would put his arms around them and give them peace and warmth.

A few years ago, people were knitting prayer shawls and attaching to them a little piece of information, that this prayer shawl was to remind the receiver that they were not forgotten and that each time they wrapped this around them, they were to remember that God was with them.

Where do you find comfort when the world is rough?

Where do you find comfort when the storms blow?

John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, that as God is our Father, the church is our Mother and to many people the church brings comfort. It is like a prayer shawl draped around us. It is where we meet fellow believers – people who have encountered the living Christ. People whose hearts have been touched by love. It is where we are supported in our faith. Where we hear the word of God and are reminded of his grace and his goodness. That's why we need to come to church!

During lockdown people missed the comfort of the church. I'm not talking about the pews but I'm talking about experiencing God's love!

Jesus sends his Spirit of comfort to those first disciples. Are we wrapping his comfort around us?

### **Thirdly he will send the Spirit to be our counsellor.**

A counsellor is not only someone who gives us good advice but who is also a good listener. Someone we can trust to keep our confidences.

Glasgow Presbytery has assigned some people to be pastoral counsellors to ministers. It is not something that I have used in my 23 years of ministry but just the other day I met up with presbytery's spiritual accompanier to have a chat and that in itself was quite liberating, as we listened to each other and we were able to support each other on our spiritual journey.

The spirit of Jesus comes into our lives to be our counsellor. We are told that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as a dove when he was being baptised in the Jordan, and that is a fantastic image for us to hold onto. God comes like a gentle dove and enters our souls.

In Genesis, God breathes his spirit into the first man and woman. In the upper room, he breathes his spirit into the disciples. The Holy Spirit comes into the lives of those who belong to him.

It comes to counsel us and to guide us and direct us. What a gift from God. He hears our cry, not from some external throne in another universe but he hears our cries from within. His spirit resides in our hearts.

Are you allowing him to bring you comfort?

#### **Fourthly, he will send the Spirit to be our advocate.**

The Spirit of Christ in our lives advocates for us before God. We can stand before God because we have one who advocates for us.

The dictionary defines advocate “as a person who puts a case forward on someone else's behalf.” This is exactly what Jesus does for us, he is our advocate before God.

Willie Barclay once wrote, “That the greatest of all mistakes is to think of Jesus as a figure in a book, as someone who lived and died, who is gone, and whose story we tell. Jesus is alive for evermore and we can meet him as we meet a friend. And it is only as we really know Jesus in that sense that we can be absolutely sure of him.”

Jesus defends us, he is our advocate.

In George Bernard Shaw's play, *Joan of Arc*, she often heard voices in her head telling her what to do. The King of France was annoyed at this and he said to her, “*Oh you and your voices, why don't the voices come to me? I am the King, not you?*”

Joan said, “*They do come to you but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field listening to them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it: but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stopped ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.*”

It is a reminder for us to set apart time for God's Spirit to speak into our hearts; a time to listen to his Spirit within us, which is our helper, comforter, counsellor and advocate, all attributes of God's Spirit in our lives.

Christ does live within us. In the words of the old hymn:

*I Serve A Risen Saviour  
He's In The World Today.  
I Know That He Is Living,  
Whatever Men May Say.  
I See His Hand Of Mercy;  
I Hear His Voice Of Cheer;  
And Just The Time I Need Him  
He's Always Near.*

*He Lives, He Lives, Christ Jesus Lives Today!  
He Walks With Me And  
Talks With Me Along Life's Narrow Way.  
He Lives, He Lives, Salvation To Impart!  
You Ask Me How I Know He Lives?  
He Lives Within My Heart.*

*In All The World Around Me  
I See His Loving Care,  
And Though My Heart Grows Weary,  
I Never Will Despair;  
I Know That He Is Leading,  
Through All The Stormy Blast;  
The Day Of His Appearing  
Will Come At Last.*

*He Lives, He Lives, Christ Jesus Lives Today!*

*Rejoice, Rejoice, Oh Christian,  
Lift Up Your Voice And Sing  
Eternal Hallelujahs  
To Jesus Christ The King!  
The Hope Of All Who Seek Him,  
The Help Of All Who Find,  
None Other Is So Loving,  
So Good And Kind.*

*He Lives, He Lives, Christ Jesus Lives Today!  
He Walks With Me And  
Talks With Me Along Life's Narrow Way.  
He Lives, He Lives, Salvation To Impart!  
You Ask Me How I Know He Lives?  
He Lives Within My Heart.*

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen.