

“When the Advocate Comes”

“When the day of Pentecost had come . . .” Luke begins his account, today’s Second Lesson. He’s telling us that there was already something called “Pentecost” that was a significant day. As is often the case in the Bible, when something significant is presented, and usually with little or no fanfare, something even more significant is about to take place. So it is here. Pentecost was the Greek term for the Jewish festival of Shavuot (also called the Feast of Weeks) — the day that celebrated the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. While not regarded today as a high holy day in Jewish circles, in the First Century it was part of the Passover observance.

Fifty days after the Passover the freed Hebrew slaves made their way to Mt. Sinai, where God “came down” and imparted to them the covenant that identified them as God’s people. We learn in today’s Second Lesson that there were ***“devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.”*** These were pilgrims who had come for Passover (one of the great acts of Jewish piety) and remained in Jerusalem because the observance could not end until the feast of Shavuot.

So this festival that celebrated the covenant gained a new meaning, as the disciples ***“were filled with the Holy Spirit.”*** This day that celebrated the outpouring of the Law of God is trumped now by the outpouring of the Spirit of God. The Law has significance, and always will have. But the Spirit brings a wholly new dimension to what it means to be, and to live as, God’s people.

“When the Advocate comes,” Jesus told the disciples, things were going to happen. Let’s look at that word, “Advocate.” The word in Greek is παρακλητος — in English “paraklete.” No, that’s not two sharp things on your baseball or golf shoes. The word literally means “to call alongside” — and took on a particular meaning in Greek courts to indicate one who stood with a defendant to offer support and counsel.

Hence, you will find this word translated variously in John (it occurs only in this chapter in his gospel and once again in his First Epistle) as “counselor,” “advocate,” or “one who speaks for another,” as well as the (too general, in my estimation) translation, “helper.” I think it is fairly common that we tend to think that the Holy Spirit is our “helper.” But I think Jesus has something else in mind. I think the Spirit is Jesus’ helper . . . and I say so because of what Jesus says will happen **“when the advocate comes.”**

First, Jesus said, **“he will testify on my behalf.”** The word “testify” in Greek is μαρτυρεω (martyreo) from which we get the English word, “martyr.” What is a martyr? We would say it is someone who suffers, even dies, for his or her beliefs. We look askance at someone who styles themselves a martyr, especially if it is over insignificant things. Little children are very good at playing the martyr — tell a three-year-old that it’s time to pick up the toys that are all over the living room floor and the Academy Award committee should be on hand for the scene that follows.

A martyr, in the sense John uses it, is one who speaks about what that person has seen or experienced. The key here is not what has been seen or experienced; the key is the speaking. The Holy Spirit speaks on behalf of Jesus, telling us about what the Spirit knows to be true of Jesus.

“You also are to testify,” Jesus tells us. At which point the Spirit engages us in help. He *advocates* us (that’s Latin, it means to “speak to” — that’s what an advocate does). What we know and experience of Jesus is filtered through the prism, the lens of the Holy Spirit. The original disciples were told that they would testify **“because you have been with me from the beginning.”** We like that because it seems to let us off the hook. We weren’t there **“from the beginning.”** We can go our merry, silent way. No . . . the implication of the Spirit’s testimony is that it informs and shapes, and then necessitates our testimony.

Jesus further informs us that **“when the Advocate comes . . . he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment..”** Once again, if we imagine the scene is a courtroom and the advocate

stands before the judge and jury, he will provide the critical evidence that leads to the right judgment. Note that Jesus assumes that the world is “wrong” — and the Holy Spirit can prove it.

The world is wrong about sin ***“because they do not believe in me.”*** What is sin? The world tends to view sin as doing, saying, thinking bad things. The Spirit proves that sin is not behaviors — those are but symptoms of the real problem: unfaith. The root of all sin is the lack of right relationship to Jesus. You cannot do right unless you are right. If you think you can shape yourself up and become a prize that you can trot out to God and go “Ta-da!” — guess again.

The world is wrong about righteousness ***“because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer.”*** Righteousness [δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosynay) in Greek] is perceived by the world as “doing what God requires.” This is a Boy Scout, keep-your-nose-clean, make sure you cross all the “t’s” and dot all the “i’s” kind of morality. The Pharisees were great at this kind of righteousness (I’ll bet you know a bunch of people like this; maybe you even see one in the mirror on occasion?)

But the New Testament sees it differently, and the Holy Spirit can prove it. Righteousness is not doing what God requires, it is being in right relationship with God. This is what Jesus did in His death, Resurrection, and now especially in His Ascension — He put us right with God. The fact that He has returned to the Father *“indicate[s] that God approved of what Jesus did.”*

The world is wrong about judgment ***“because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”*** The world thinks of judgment as some future event — Jesus says that the Spirit will prove that judgment has already been made . . . it’s a done deal. If judgment is coming, we think we will always have time to make amends, clean up our act, and ace out the old boy upstairs. Who do we think we’re fooling? We think maybe we can fool God; but we succeed at fooling only ourselves.

Now, who is this ***“ruler of this world”*** Jesus talks about? Take your pick:

the Devil (Satan), money, power, status, — as one commentator expressed it: *“any authority that people of the world follow, such as one's own selfish desires that keep one from believing and following Jesus.”* Already judged! Condemned! The Holy Spirit witnesses into our hearts these truths, to let us know where our silly, vain, pigheaded, and just plain wrong attitudes, opinions, and thoughts come from.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” Instead of all those silly, vain, pigheaded, and just plain wrong attitudes, opinions, and thoughts the Spirit brings us truth. But Jesus is quite specific about how the Spirit does that — He *guides*. The word in Greek means *“to lead the way.”* When you encounter a clerk at WalMart and ask where you might find “brass-plated left-handed wing-nuts” that clerk is supposed to do more than just tell you *“Aisle 6B”* — no, that clerk is to lead you to Aisle 6B, and point out the “brass-plated left-handed wing-nuts” display that is three-fourths of the way down Aisle 6B, right next to the “brass-plated right-handed wing-nuts” and just below the “chrome plated hex nuts.” WalMart learned that good customer relations means helping people find what they need, not just telling them where it is supposed to be (they also learned that if people find what they're looking for they tend to buy it, and then come back to buy other things they are looking for) *[please note how I avoided the word “need” in that last sentence.]*

The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. That can be uncomfortable. If someone tells you that toilet paper is stuck to the bottom of your shoe that's an embarrassing truth. If the teacher hands back your test and you correctly answered only three of the fifty math problems, that “F” at the top of the page is a painful truth. If someone tells you that you are a stuck-up, self-centered, snob, that would be a challenging truth (we would deny it! But what if it is true?)

When we look in that mirror I mentioned a while back, what do we see? I suspect most of us do not see incarnate evil looking back at us. We see stuff we don't like — wrinkles, grey hair, too much “me,” the occasional

blemish — but we don't normally see ourselves as "all that bad." The Spirit guides me to see the real sin that is really in me. I can pretend, fake, convince, deceive, lie, cheat, play-act, and fool myself, you, and lots of others that *"I'm okay."* The Spirit takes me by the hand to that mirror and shows me: *"There you are."* But He does not leave it at that — He guides me into the truth that this "real me" is no longer "really me" — the Christ who now lives in me is the "real me."

This is what Jesus means when He tells us ***"When the Advocate comes . . . He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*** Everything of Jesus is spoken into our hearts. Everything of Jesus is at work in our lives. Everything of Jesus is now ours.

Have you ever been so thirsty that you could hardly wait to see a drinking fountain, or find a bottle of water, and when you find it just drink, and drink, and drink? Elmer Towns once said of the Holy Spirit: *"I just want to sit under the spout and let the glory come out."* That's what the Holy Spirit does in us. When the Advocate comes, the glory will stream in.

Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism, his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed (as we will join to confess in just a little while): *"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him."* That is a curious statement: *"I believe that I cannot . . . believe . . .?"* Curious? Maybe. Yet true. I can't...you can't...not anyone can believe...but the Spirit...

Faith is a gift, a gift of the Holy Spirit. The new covenant this day brings in is not that different from the covenant celebrated at Shavuot. In both instances, God comes down to meet, to encounter His people because they simply cannot get to Him. In both cases, God has already acted to bring them to safety and freedom. The folks who gathered at Mt. Sinai had witnessed the Passover and the parting the Red Sea, God's great acts of salvation. We who gather in this place have seen the cross, the empty tomb, the ascension hill, God's great acts of salvation. In both cases, God reveals how lives cannot be what they were before all this took place — they are forever changed.

The ancient Jews, when they weren't ignoring the covenant altogether, took that covenant and made it into a private club, an exclusive club made up of rules, regulations, and regimens that were to be strictly followed. Very few were admitted. Enters now the Advocate, who speaks into our hearts, not rules, but love; not regulations, but hope; not regimens, but faith. The Advocate has come. The Advocate keeps on coming. The Advocate will come. To testify, to lead, and to glorify. All this He does in us so that we may likewise testify to the truth, lead others to Christ, and glorify our Lord in lives of purpose and power.

Did you catch the word repeated in today's First Lesson and then again in the Second Lesson? ***“Prophecy!”*** Not *“Foretell the future,”* but, *“Speak for and speak to!”* Speak for Christ, speak in God's Name, speak the truth, speak the power of God because it is now at work in you. The prophet Ezekiel is asked, ***“Mortal, can these [dry] bones live?”*** We who have been given the Spirit of Christ know the answer (please, look around you at those gathered here): *“Yes! These bones live . . . in Christ!”*

Amen.