

ANOTHER HELPER

John 14:15-21

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This morning we continue in our study of John's gospel, beginning today in John 14:15.

If you've ever had children, you'll resonate with the experience. Toddlers have certain skills. Powers, we might call them. For example, they can hear you say the thing you meant for them not to hear. And they can miss what you're saying right at them. They can destroy an entire house with a single granola bar.

They also have an uncanny ability to sense when you're about to leave them. Children can be playing on the floor at home hear that jingle of the keys or see you putting shoes on, and they immediately know. They immediately have questions: Where are you going? Can we go? Then who is going to stay with us?

This is the experience, in part, of the disciples in John's gospel, chapter 14. Jesus' disciples have learned that he is going away. This portion of the gospel is sometimes called the "Farewell Discourse." It includes all of chapters 14-17. From the end of the last supper scene in chapter 13 on, Jesus is telling the disciples that he is going to leave, that he will have to go away.

Last week we encountered the Son of God crawling around in the dirt to wash the disciple's feet in John's version of the Last Supper scene. But in the second half of John 13, Jesus begins saying things that raise concerns.

"Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'" John 13:33
He further clarifies in 13:36: **"Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."**

But still, the disciples are anxious. Having left everything behind for the last three years to follow Jesus' every step, their hearts are uneasy. Jesus comforts them saying, **"Do not let your heart be troubled" (John 14:1).** Before our text today, He has been explaining that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and also his intimate relationship with the Father.

But he's going to leave. And he knows it. This part of John's gospel, and actually one of the central aims of the entire account, is to answer the question: how is the Christian community supposed to survive beyond this crisis? How are they (we) to deal with Jesus' absence?

John's gospel offers an answer: ¹⁶ **I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;** ¹⁷ **that is the Spirit of truth...**

Consoling his students, the rabbi, Jesus, tells them that God will send them another comforter who will never leave them alone. The good news that they receive is that the Father will provide them with a Helper who will be with them forever. This Spirit of Truth is the very Spirit of God that Jesus says will abide *with them* and be *in them* after he leaves.

But what is this Spirit and what does it mean for us? Who is this Helper that he promises? And what will it help with?

Christian belief in a Trinity, a God's who exists in unity – oneness – as three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), has been reaffirmed again and again throughout Christian history and comes to us from Jesus in texts like this one. We understand God the Father. Jesus is a little easier to deal with, maybe. But, there is so much confusion about the Spirit.

Americans believe in the Trinity. But it's complicated.

Recent studies show: Seven out of 10 Americans (70 percent) agree there is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. But, A quarter (28 percent) say "the Spirit is a divine being but not equal to God the Father and Jesus." Twenty-one percent are not sure on this point.¹

Recent Barna study shows: Most Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living force. Overall, 38% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is "a symbol of God's power or presence but is not a living entity." Just one-third of Christians affirmed that the Holy Spirit is an actual living force (9% disagreed somewhat, 25% disagreed strongly) while 9% were not sure.²

So, as we encounter Jesus talking about this Helper that the Father will provide in his absence, we are asking: Who is this Helper? What might it mean for us?

Jesus is consoling the disciples and preparing them because the absence of their teacher is troubling to them. I'm sure the idea of losing Jesus had to have been unsettling in a lot of ways. But, as he tells them, there's an answer, a solution to this problem. But before we discover again what Jesus tells them, I wonder: do you need an answer? Is this the answer to a question that you're even asking? Has your life needed a Helper?

I'm convinced that, for a lot people who consider themselves Christians, there is great confusion about God's Spirit, and its partly because their understanding of the gospel has no need for it. They've understood salvation from Jesus as simply about how to get to heaven. But that ignores the fact that salvation for Jesus, and certainly for Paul, is not just about the life to

¹ Bob Smietana, "Americans Love God and the Bible, Are Fuzzy on Details," *Lifeway Research* (September 27, 2016): <https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/09/27/americans-love-god-and-the-bible-are-fuzzy-on-the-details/>

² "Most Americans Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist," *Research Release* (April 13, 2009); <https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/>

come but about the creation of a Spirit-filled community in the here and now. If heaven is our only aim, then Jesus' absence isn't really a problem for us, is it?

The faith that these disciples had formed made it hard to keep on living – impossible to move on – in the absence of the teacher that they had apprenticed their life to. How can they continue in the way if he's no longer there to show the way? Jesus says, "don't worry, another one is coming." But if we're not asking how to follow Jesus in his way or how to obey his commands, then the answer to the problem that Jesus offers here doesn't matter much, does it?

But here's the problem: Jesus begins this passage by showing that those who love Jesus, those who receive his life, are those who obey his word, who do what he says. And if you think that you're going to discover what it means to love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and to love you neighbor as yourself *on your own*, you're mistaken.

So, we join with these disciples in saying: Where can we now turn? Who will show us the way?

The answer that Jesus gives is that *we've been given Another Helper*. The word that Jesus uses for this Spirit in verse 16 is term *Paraclete* in John's gospel. This is the first occurrence of the word *paraclete*, used for "helper." Various translators use different English equivalents for this one-of-a-kind word. Among the possible translations, we find "comforter" (KJV), "advocate" (NIV), "counselor" (HCS), and "helper" (NASB). Because of its rich meaning and uniqueness some have even opted to simply translate it *Paraclete*, to not lose the original meaning.

The term only occurs in the New Testament books written by John, and it only occurs five times (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). Literally, the word means "one who is called alongside." So, the closest equivalent is probably "Advocate." In the secular Greek of Jesus' day, the word was used for a legal assistant or an advocate. If one translates the word "counselor," we should understand it as a "legal counselor," in the terms of one who comes to defend and advise. This is someone to stand by you.

Defending Yourself

In 1973, Ted Bundy was accepted into law school at the University of Utah based on strong letters of recommendation from his psychology professors. One of the most notorious serial killers of the 20th century, Ted Bundy confessed to murdering dozens of women in the 1960s and 70s in multiple US states. The number of his crimes remains unknown.

The one-time law student - who committed many of his murders while based at a Utah university - served as his own lawyer during a 1979 trial for two murders, and for assaulting several other women. Polly Nelson, Bundy's former lawyer, "[Bundy] sabotaged the entire defense effort out of spite, distrust, and grandiose delusion. Ted [was] facing murder charges,

with a possible death sentence, and all that mattered to him apparently was that he be in charge.”³

Jesus tells *us* - who live in moments in which he is not physically with us - that for those who have faith in him, there is a helper, a Spirit who will abide with you and live in you. Literally, this Paraclete is “one who make appeals on your behalf,” an Advocate. Yet, with the power of God himself available as our Helper, we have so often chosen in utter foolishness to help ourselves.

Abraham Lincoln once said: “He who represents himself has a fool for a client.”

The Scriptures say that there is a power that will come alongside you in this life and will bear witness to and cast light upon the way of Jesus for you. Yet, for so many, apparently all that matters is that *you* be in charge. So, its no surprise that we ignore or downplay or remain confused about the Spirit because the truth is life is a lot harder with that kind of help. Some things seem easier to do on your own. Sometimes adding more people to the equation makes things harder.

Among other super powers, my son knows every time the water hose turns on. See, he loves to water things. When he wants to help water the plants, everything but the plants gets watered. Sometimes a helper makes things more complicated.

The Spirit doesn't come to makes things harder, but it does question our control and force us to submit to another. We can't be in charge in the way we would like to. When we're open to the Spirit, we have to listen to what the Spirit has to say. And when we listen, we might have to change. Our priorities might have to change. Your life might have to change.

John reminds us later, in verse 26, what the role of this Spirit is.

“But 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 said to you.”

When Jesus said they are going to have “another” *paraclete*, it shows that he himself has been both their helper and advocate. In 1 John 2:1, Jesus is even depicted as **“the One who speaks...in our defense.”** The difference between the coming *paraclete* (the Holy Spirit) and the one who is departing (Jesus) is that they will have the presence of the Holy Spirit with them forever.

“Another” there also reminds us that this is another of the same kind. When we look at all of John's mentions of this Paraclete we find that this Spirit is in tandem with Jesus. Paraclete is not just another name for the Spirit, but a way of describing how the spirit functions. It is the continuing presence of Jesus. What the Paraclete does is not new but is a continuation of the work of Jesus.

³ Cheish Merryweather, “10 Cold Killers Who Made the Mistake of Representing Themselves,” (Sept. 25, 2018): <http://listverse.com/2018/09/25/10-cold-killers-who-made-the-mistake-of-representing-themselves/>

Just as Jesus was “The Truth,” so the Paraclete is the ‘Spirit of Truth’ (14.6; cf. 14.17; 15.26; 16.13). Just as the world could not accept Jesus, so it cannot accept the Paraclete (15:18; cf. 14:17). More similarities with Jesus include descriptions of the Paraclete as one who is sent, as one who witnesses, who speaks only what he hears, and who declares the things to come.

Jesus and the Spirit are never at odds. The Spirit comes to point to Jesus. He interprets Jesus for his disciples. This is where I think a lot of people misunderstand the Spirit. We make the Spirit’s power about ourselves. For John, this Spirit is about Jesus, about continuing his presence and work and ministry on earth.

For all of these reasons the first disciples, and hearers of John’s gospel, couldn’t help but come to the conclusion that Jesus had not abandoned them. They would not be orphaned.

When the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, known mostly through his disciple Plato, died it was recorded that his disciples had become “orphaned.” They had been cut off from his parenthood. Other Jewish rabbis were recorded in the same way. This metaphor of family was used to talk about what it was like to be left without a master.

There have been great teachers in history. Some of them have left a great legacy through their life, example, and followers. Others have even managed to write down a great deal, leaving volumes of teaching or thought. No teacher in history has ever left more than a teaching or example. Jesus offers God’s very spirit and power. His first promise to them about his departure is that there *will be a continuing presence of God alive in them.*

And even more unlike any other, Jesus’ second promise of his continuing presence is about his own return:

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

After his departure, Jesus will not leave his followers abandoned as fatherless children, orphans. On the contrary, he tells them that he will “come to them.” The obvious question for the interpreter is: To what is Jesus referring when he says that he will “come to his disciples?” New Testament scholars argue for three possibilities. When Jesus speaks of his “coming to his disciples,” he is referring to: (1) his resurrection, (2) his second coming, or (3) the descent and gift of the Holy Spirit. In this verse, it seems most likely that Jesus is referring to his own resurrection appearances.

“After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also.²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

Have you ever noticed in his resurrection appearances that Jesus never reveals himself to nonbelievers, to the world? You might argue an exception to the case happens when Jesus reveals himself to Saul, even as Saul was persecuting the church. It’s true that Saul wasn’t a

disciple before the appearance, but because of Jesus' self-disclosure to him, Saul becomes a disciple. So, in every resurrection appearance, Jesus is showing himself to a disciple. Jesus assures the disciples that because he lives (a reference to his resurrection), they, too, will be resurrected.

The resurrection of Jesus changes things in so many ways. Not only do the disciples see their rabbi living again, they themselves now live in light of all that resurrection life represents. In fact, on the third day (that day), they will know at last the coexistence between the Father, the Son, and the disciples. **I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.**

Verse 21 continues, **"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."**

What does it mean to love Jesus? Love is both listening to the commands of God and obeying them. Anyone familiar with the writings of John will not be surprised at the apostle's sharing the words of Jesus that equate love for him with active obedience. Several times in his writings, John connects our love for Christ to our obedience to Christ's commands (14:21, 23; 15:14; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 1:6).

In last week's sermon, we heard Jesus say that he would love his disciples to the very end (John 13:1). We learned about the disciples' love for each other (13:34-35). This inseparable link between our love for each other and our love for God is also connected to carrying out God's commands when John writes in his first epistle, **"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments"** (1 John 5:2).

The greatest promise of this verse is that Jesus will "reveal Himself to the one who loves Him." The more walk in his way, the more we embrace all that he says and shows about God, ourselves, and the world, the more we see of Jesus.

In this passage, Jesus is offering comfort to the troubled hearts of his disciples. These are words of great comfort for us today. He has not left us orphaned. His Spirit will indwell his followers, reminding them of all that he has taught them. According to John, this struggling group of disciples have better days ahead! The very people who struggled to understand Jesus and never fully grasped Him will receive even greater power and understanding in days to come.

The argument that John's gospel is making to the earliest believers who would've heard this after Jesus is gone is that they are at an *advantage*. They don't get off the hook with, "if only we had been there." No, John consoles them by showing them that not only do they now have Jesus' words, but the Spirit will interpret them. Later generations are blessed because they will have access to the guidance of the Spirit-Paraclete. Jesus even clarifies in John 20 when he says its those who believe and have not seen that are blessed.

We are not left as orphans. There is a Spirit given to us who teaches, and corrects, and comforts, and helps, and comes to our side. Do you know this paraclete?

Maybe no one would understand the concerns of the disciples better than someone who has lost a parent.

In January 2011, Army First Lt. Demetrius M. Frison left for his first combat tour in Afghanistan. On May 10, 2011, he was killed by a roadside bomb. His son, Chris, is now 8 and lives in Manheim, Penn., with his mother, Mikki. His hand written notes reads:

“Hey Daddy, I am missing you a whole lot. I wonder what kind of things that we would be doing and what kind of adventures we would be having if you were here. I wish you could see me play soccer. Mom gets to watch me. She says you have the best seat in the house from heaven. But I would rather have you here. I wish we could play video games and catch together. I also wish you could read me more bedtime stories. I love you very much. Love, Chris”⁴

In the absence of his father, Chris is left to wonder they might be doing together if his father were here. Jesus says that though he has gone away, in the Spirit, *He is here!*

In Chris’ words, I “wonder what kind of things we would be doing and what kind of adventures we would be having” if *we believed that!*

⁴ Mitty Mirer, “Letters from the Children of Fallen Service Members To The Parents They Lost,” *The New York Times Magazine* (May 25, 1018): <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/25/magazine/memorial-day-letters.html>