

Written Copy: Christ's Gift to Combat Isolation-John 14:16-19

6th Sunday in Easter

Sunday, May 17th, 2020

Text: John 14:16-19

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

Exegetical Statement

Jesus has loved His disciples with a love that is different from the natural human affection. He loves them unconditionally and sacrificially. And He shares this love with them. When they have this love in their hearts and live according to it the natural response is obedience His wishes and will. Because Jesus loves them so much, even though they will abandon Him in the Garden He will not abandon them. He will send the Holy Spirit, who will function in the same roles that He fulfilled in their lives of Advocate before the Father, Advisor according the Word, Comforter and Teacher as He reminds them of all Christ taught and applies it to their lives. The gift that is the Spirit isn't a stop gap measure, He is with them now and will be in them forever. He is the Spirit of Truth. He reveals truth to them because what He says is truth, He defines what is truth. The world can't come to Him or choose Him. He can only be received as a gift from the Father and the Son. He comes so that the disciples will not feel abandoned and without hope when Christ returns to the Father. Christ will return, coming to them in His resurrection, coming to them through the gift of the Spirit blown on them, and later filling them at Pentecost. All these looking forward to the complete fulfillment on the Last Day. While the world will not see Him, the disciples will through the eyes of faith provided by the Spirit who reveals Father and Son to mankind. HE brings to us from Christ who has life, life now and eternal life to come. Through the presence of the Spirit we are united with Christ and the Father in the same unity that the Trinity enjoys. We have the love they have shown to us. We are moved to hold firm to the commands and principals that Christ taught which the Spirit brings to mind and expounds on. As we love Christ with that God-love so too the Trinity loves us and the Word made flesh manifests God to us through that love.

Focus Statement:

Jesus has not left His Church alone. Even when we must live apart in Shelter at Home isolation we have the gift of His Spirit who is our Comforter when we are sacred, our Advocate before the Father when our sins accuse us, our Teacher who reminds us of all Christ has promised us, and our Counselor to grow our faith. Through Him we experience God's love and live with the Trinity united to us. He applies to my life all that Christ has won for us in His death and resurrection

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

In COVID-19 isolation we can feel alone to face a scary future just like the disciples as Jesus prepared them for His departure in death. We feel like the Church separated and apart, alone. Christ seems distant to us, if even there at all

What the hearer should do as a result:

Allow the Spirit through His Word of truth to counsel, teach, and build us up. We use this time of isolation as the Disciples did in preparation of the time to come when, released from our isolation we can once again minister as the Church.

Subject Sentence: Christ gives His comforting presence in the Spirit

Introduction: The Effects of Isolation:

Think back to those days long ago, before there was such a thing as COVID-19 to worry about. When we could and did gather together as friends and family in celebration of life. Think back to last Christmas, when you gathered together with your kids, your grandkids, your relatives' grandkids. Little bodies running around laughing, and yelling, and throwing stuff around. Food flying through the air, quarrels over whose drink that is, whose turn it is to do the dishes, who makes the best stuffing... Remember how at the end of the evening it was a relief to see them all leave and go home? Or it was a relief for you to leave and head back to your quiet and orderly existence. You see those times of festive gathering through new lenses now, don't you? A little joyous commotion goes a long way. A couple months of isolation goes even farther.

Now for most of us, Shelter in Place has been a time of isolation, yet to differing degrees for each of us. For those with a family all in one house, or even a couple living together, these last couple months have played out differently than those who live alone and have had to Shelter in Place in isolation. Either way this has been a trying time. Not too many of us are wired to live the life of a monk. God has designed us to be gregarious social creatures, surrounding ourselves with family and friends. We long for contact with others outside of our immediate family. We long for a break in the scenery. The isolation of Sheltering at Home can make one feel like the world is passing them by and they are missing out on all of it.

I had my own personal experience with the depression that comes from isolation during my Vicarage in Elmhurst Illinois. Susan and I wanted to spend time with our kids and our Grandson Denny back here in Michigan. But we had two Great Danes that would have to go with us, and there was no place for us to stay here with them. So Susan and I would take turns, one of us would drive over here while the other would stay there with the dogs. So when Christmas 2016 rolled around it was Susan who came over to celebrate with the kids. I was assigned to preach and lead worship during the mid-week Advent Services, do the liturgy and Children's Message for the three Christmas Eve Services, and preach and lead worship Christmas Day. So, I couldn't go. I didn't think it would be any big deal to stay home. It was a busy week leading up to Christmas and by the time service was over Christmas Morning I was whipped. I went back to the house and took a long nap. Susan had made me Christmas dinner; it was in the fridge waiting for me.

One of the Elders who I was good friends with had invited me over to his house to celebrate Christmas, but I politely declined. I said to myself, "I'm a big boy. I'll be fine. I can relax and watch all the movies I'd been putting off. The peace and quiet will be awesome. And it was, for a few hours anyway. Then gradually it became depressing. That became oppressive. I think the biggest thing for me was knowing that my family were all enjoying Christmas together without me. I thought about the invitation that I'd been given to Christmas Dinner at the Elder's house. I wished now that I'd accepted it. Too late now. I didn't feel right

calling and inviting myself. I called a few friends who were all busy with their family gatherings. I spiraled further into depression. I felt abandoned. What I thought would be freeing and invigorating had become stifling. I felt like the world was passing me by and I was missing out.

In our Gospel Lesson the disciples are beginning to experience feelings of isolation and abandonment. While they do have each other, their Master, for whom they all had left behind families and careers, was telling them He was going away. And where He was going, they could not come. The One whom they expected to build their future around was leaving, and with Him was also departing their hopes and dreams. He told them that He was going to prepare a place for them and would return to take them with Him. But how long would that be? He had been talking about His suffering and death on the cross, if that was the leaving He was talking about, well; how could anyone come back from that? Like Mary and Martha perhaps they held out hope for the resurrection of all flesh at the end. But what about the time between now and then? Jesus knew, that left to themselves, they would feel hopeless and abandoned. They would feel like orphans, like those without a father. And nothing could be further from the truth

Jesus answer: The Comforter/Counselor/Advocate/Helper

Jesus gives them the promise of another “Helper”, whom we know as the Holy Spirit. The name that is translated as “Helper” you may have heard before: the “Paraclete” It’s a Greek word that has many subtle layers of meaning. And when we take into consideration the reason Jesus is promising to send this third member of the Trinity, we can see how He fulfills them all of them. Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to fulfill the roles of Comforter and Counselor, Advocate, and Helper in the lives of those disciples. And He sends that same Spirit to do the same in our lives too.

He comes to be the Counselor and Comforter: to be the One who comes alongside you when you are scared, feeling abandoned. He comes to lift you up and to carry you. He comes as a Teacher, to bring to your recollection all the Jesus has taught and promised His Church. He not only teaches and reminds you of what Jesus said, but helps you to apply His teaching to your life now. He gives you words of comfort, strength, and hope. He gives you His words, God’s Words, recorded in Scripture as He moved men long ago to write them down. The Words of Truth from the Spirit of Truth. But He brings more than just words, spoken at a distance by one who feels sorry for us and wants to cheer us up. He speaks them to us in person, into our hearts. He speaks them as One who is very much present with us, united with us. This the Counselor and Comforter who is poured into our hearts and minds in Baptism. He makes these words of comfort “for you”.

He comes to be our Advocate; one who speaks on our behalf. He speaks on our behalf in the presence of the Father. He speaks whenever our sins and shortcomings rise up to convict us and condemn us. He speaks to us with those very words He wrote, the Law, which

explains what God's Holy and perfect will is. He speaks His word that shows us that our will: our thoughts, words, and actions, fall far short of what they should be as God's baptized children. But He also testifies before the Father that we who trust in Christ by faith, have been washed clean of all that is foul in our lives. As He moved Peter to write (**1 Peter 3:18**) **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,**" And He has. When we have the Spirit, we also have the Savior who sent Him to us. And we have the Father. As Jesus testifies to His disciples then and to us now (**John 14:20**) **In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.**" When you have one member of the Trinity united with you personally through the waters of Baptism, you have them all. All three are your Advocates whenever your sinful guilty heart speaks otherwise, or the devil whispers otherwise. The Spirit of Truth speaks a stronger and better word, right into your ear, right into your heart.

He comes to be your Helper, to help you to live a life of obedience to Christ's commands demonstrates your love for Him. He gives you the same love that drove Christ to suffer and die for you. A love that changes your heart and mind. A love that moves you to begin to desire to obey Jesus commands, because that is how you can best say "I love you" back to Him. He works to keep that love ruling in your life by showing you through the Law those times when you turn, and then turns you back to your Savior through the Gospel. He is the Helper whose working at times can go unnoticed. He works not to point the finger at Himself, but always to turn our gaze to Jesus., the One who came to show us just exactly who the Father is and how much He loves us. He points to Christ's Real Presence among us now in Word and Sacrament. And He points us to that day when we will see Him again, not with the eyes of faith, but with the brand-new eyes we will receive along with our new bodies on Resurrection Day. He works to keep that love alive in us until our day of Resurrection comes.

Preparing us to be the Church in a Post COVID-19 World

This Spirit was with the disciples even then in the Upper Room as Jesus prepared them to witness His soon to come suffering and death. The Spirit was there to carry them through that dark night after Jesus was taken down from the cross and put into the tomb. The Spirit carried them through that Sabbath rest on Saturday. And when Jesus rose again on Easter and appeared to them in that Upper Room. (**John 20:21-23**) ²¹ **Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."** ²² **And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."** They received the Spirit in a brand-new way that empowered them to be ministers of the Gospel. The Spirit was with them as Jesus explained how all that happened was to fulfill the Father's plan from the beginning. The Spirit remained with them as they headed back to Jerusalem after He ascended. He remained with them throughout the following 50 days as they awaited the fulfillment of Jesus promise (**Acts 1:8**) **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come**

upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." So that on the day of Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit in way they never had before, they were ready to do the work of the Church, to take the Gospel out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth

That same Holy Spirit is with you. He is preparing you for what is to come. He is preparing you for the day when the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. The day when we can, without fear and worry return to gathering as the Church, worshipping as the Church, serving in our neighborhood as the Church. That Spirit is the same God who Paul described in **Acts 17:24-25** **²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.** Yet He chooses to live in you. To serve you as your source of strength when you feel weak. To serve as your Counselor, Comforter, Advocate, and Helper. He speaks to you these words of comfort and hope from **Isaiah 41:10** **Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.** Words of comfort from **Philippians 4:6-7** **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Words of comfort from Jesus Himself **John 14:27** **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.** He speaks these words to share with you that special peace so that you can be His means to do the same in the lives of others.

Back in Elmhurst, that Christmas day, as I tried to deal with my depression on my own, I remember getting a phone call. I almost wasn't going to answer it because I didn't want anyone to hear the brokenness in my voice. It was my friend, the Elder and his wife. They told me they had set a place at the table for dinner for me. They wanted me to come and enjoy Christmas with their family. They wouldn't take no for an answer. They even had a gift that was my contribution to the White Elephant gift giving. It was a short walk on a snowy afternoon. But it was so heartwarming to receive that invitation. And even better to enjoy the celebration of Christ's birth with those who really wanted to be Jesus with skin on in my life. To be the embodiment of His presence and His love with someone in need.

Conclusion

This has been a time of isolation for many of us. Harder on some than on others. Many of you have dealt with depression and loneliness. Yet you are not alone, Christ has sent His Spirit to live with and within you. You feel disconnected from your brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet you remain connected through the Spirit we share. You need to hear words of comfort, peace, and love. The Holy Spirit takes the very words of God and applies them to your heart and your life. There will come a day when Shelter in Place will be lifted for all of us. You can and will gather together with friends and family and loved ones. And when that day comes, invite those in your life who have gone through COVID-19 without the Spirit who comforted you, taught you, helped and guided you. The Spirit who always reminded you whose precious child you are. Invite them. And share with them what He has taught you through this long dark night of isolation. He is at work right now in your life and mine to prepare us for that day. Amen