

God's Spirit-Advocate

John 14:15-21

This sermon was preached by Pastor Heather Wigdahl on Sunday, May 31, 2011

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior—through the Holy Spirit, God present among us, Amen.

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. An advocate, for us. But what does the Holy Spirit do? How would you answer that question? What does the Holy Spirit do? Hold that question, if you will.

"I will not leave you orphaned." Jesus says. Another advocate will be with you forever. "I am coming to you," Jesus continues. Not just once, but always—*constantly* coming into your presence. God's Spirit will be alive in you.

In the very next few verses, Jesus will explain to his disciples, "The Holy Spirit will *teach* you everything and will *remind* you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:25-26). At that moment, on the night before Jesus arrest and betrayal, as he is sharing these last words with his disciples, they were MORE THAN A LITTLE confused, and concerned.

I can imagine them saying, 'but Jesus, LIFE is complicated. How can you leave us? This community is challenging, our *relationships* are challenging. Citizenship is daunting in this empire. Society can be so debilitating. WE NEED YOU. We can't figure it out on our own.'

The roles we serve, as workers, bosses, leaders, colleagues, neighbors, family, friends—these are complex. And living out our faith in our daily lives can really be tough, sometimes.

The Holy Spirit will teach you and remind you all I've taught you. When life gets complicated, I find these words incredibly hopeful. Because what I hear Jesus saying to his disciples, and to us, is that: "*We don't know everything.*" And we don't have to. "*We will always have more to learn.*" "**But I will not leave you orphaned,**" Jesus says. The Spirit will work to lead you toward truth.

In every generation, we are faced with new questions and perplexities. Jesus *knew* there were, and would be, some questions the sacred writings didn't address. Think about the discoveries of science and our world since *our Holy Scriptures* were written. Think about our solar system and galaxy; the complexities of our bodies, cells and atoms.

Jesus acknowledges *there were some things he never talked about*. But “the Spirit will be your guide,” he says. “The Spirit will lead you toward truth—toward me, toward love.”

Rosemary Radford Reuther, a wise theologian and general church historian suggests that there are *two things* that the church must always and absolutely do. The **first** is to pass on the tradition from one generation to the next. The Church *must* tell the story of Jesus to our children and grandchildren. That is our first and foremost work.

But that's not all. The **second** thing the church must always and absolutely do, is: be open to the winds of the Holy Spirit, by which we, as God's people, *come alive* in each generation. We *pass on* tradition, faith, we pass on our story—but we listen, pray for and pay attention to, the Holy Spirit at work in us too. **Here and now**, Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit: for us to *come alive* in faith, in hope, in love for God and God's people.

Theologians and artists throughout history have imagined the Holy Spirit as a sort of *divine go-between*,” a holy conduit; a secret passageway, a whispering mediator, a winged messenger. The Holy Spirit is a holy communicator:

As the Apostle Paul's says so poetically: “The Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words,” (Romans 8:26). This is one of my favorite verses, for those times in life when I don't know what to pray for, or when my prayer cannot be contained by mere words.

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to intercede for us: this Advocate, “*another* advocate,” Jesus says. Jesus, our *first* advocate, the Holy Spirit *another* advocate for us: an advocate, *as in the court of law* is what we picture, what Jesus alludes to.

What does the Holy Spirit do? Remember that question I wanted you to hold on to? The Holy Spirit *advocates*. **But on whose behalf?**

If ever I were to find myself in a court of law, I would want a good lawyer. And I know a few great lawyers in our congregation—I would want one of them defending me! But is *that* what the Holy Spirit does? Advocate on our behalf?

Does Jesus think we need a lawyer? An advocate to defend us, before God? God as Judge; God as sentencer? Or, is this holy communicator, our holy conduit, advocating something else? *Advocating*, not on our behalf before God, but on God's behalf, before us?

Maybe we don't need an *advocate* to plead our “case” to God near so much as we need the Spirit of Truth to plead God's case to us. We need the spirit of truth to *teach* us the ways of Christ, to *teach* us the TRUTH about ourselves; about one another, and about God, our creator. We need God's Spirit to be at work in us, as we engage our Holy Scriptures, and as THE WORD, who is Christ, engages us.

What if the Spirit's work—**what the Spirit does**—is to remind us of the wonders of life, and God's created world? What if the Spirit's word is to speak on behalf of the poor, the lonely, and the broken? What if the Spirit's wind blows to wake us up: to perpetuating cycles of violence, war, and oppression? What if the Spirit whispers to us, for peace and justice? What if the Spirit breathes IN US, to stretch us from the inside out: with compassion for all that God loves?

Yes, the Spirit does intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; **Yes**, the Spirit is our divine connector and communicator; but the *biggest help we need*, day to day, is for God's Spirit-Advocate to move and breathe and coax and prod us into becoming grace and hope and love, as we *learn to follow the truth*, who is Christ Jesus our Lord. A "who" not a "what."

God's Spirit breathes in us. That's what the Spirit does: advocates on behalf of our creator; advocates God's truth and love for us—for all.

As one theologian says so simply, "Spirit is just another word for 'God Present'" (Paul Tillich). God interacting with us—God advocating for all God loves.

God's spirit breathes in you. **THAT'S** what the Spirit does. It's not a question. It's a promise: God's spirit breathes, in you. So take notice. Listen. Pay attention. Take a deep breath, if that helps you remember. *TAKE IN* the promise: that the one who has given you life is infused in all that in life, too.

May God's Spirit Advocate breathe, whisper, coax and prod you into fuller faith; faith active in love, as Christ our Lord teaches. Amen!