

Spirit of Truth©

John 14:15-21

May 25, 2014

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This weekend many people in our nation will be going to the cemeteries where loved ones are buried. We will decorate the graves with flowers and flags. I remember well, growing up, going with my mother and grandmother who had been working for several days getting numerous containers ready, filled with flowers to take to the gravesides of family members.

This Memorial Weekend – tomorrow, of course, Memorial Day – is a day set aside for Americans to remember those who have fought for our freedom, those who have given their lives.

But we have extended that memorial out to remembering other loved ones who have gone on, those whom we have loved and lost over time.

How appropriate to be thinking on this Scripture today – this chapter from the gospel of John where Jesus is comforting and preparing his disciples for his own pending death. He has already told them he will prepare a place for them and he has promised that they will be with him in that place someday. And that promise extends out through the years to us, as well.

But, in our times of loss and fear and grief, it is difficult to be comforted. I'm sure the disciples were still very afraid. After all, they did not know what was really going to happen, how it would all come about, what they would do without Jesus. Fear of the unknown can be so overwhelming.

So Jesus promises to send them an Advocate. There is that word again – the Greek word I told you about a while back – *Paracletos*, which means “one who comes along side.” Jesus says he is not leaving his friends as if they were orphans. He is sending *another* advocate.

Jesus, of course, was the first advocate. He truly, physically was there going along side the disciples and all those whom he came in contact with.

An advocate can mean someone who is a legal spokesperson, and I think Jesus was that, for many who were oppressed by the religious rulers of the day.

But an advocate also can be very relational – someone who brings help, consolation, comfort and encouragement. That is a great description of one who comes alongside another.

Jesus came along side us in the incarnation so that we might know God, that we might see an otherwise invisible God. But with the person of Jesus gone, how would the disciples ... and how, in fact, would we know God, how would we be comforted in our

most devastating moments of loss, how would we have encouragement or courage to face a new day with the absence of the person, or the thing, we have lost.

For there can be more that we lose besides the life of a loved one. We might lose friends, a good job, our health, our memory, we could lose self confidence, or trust ... the list is long and many of us have experienced the loss of something dear, something that has been an important part of who we are.

How can we know that what Jesus says is true? How can we have that hope that is so deep and sure, the hope that comes from a promise made over 2,000 years ago? How can we read the Scriptures and have those words reach out and touch our hearts and compel us to believe in it? How can we possibly know Jesus in a personal way without him physically being here?

It is because of this *Paracletos* ... this Advocate who comes along side of us that Jesus promised. The Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Truth. It is the Holy Spirit that opens our eyes in new ways so that we can see the promises and know the truth in them.

It is the Spirit of Truth that helps us through that dark and fearful night, assuring us of being loved and being forgiven and of belonging to the one who claims us and knows us by name.

In a couple of weeks we will celebrate Pentecost ... the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. It is the time when we read that the power of the Spirit caused the disciples to preach the good news about Jesus' death and resurrection to many people in many different languages – languages they did not know.

It was in that powerful preaching that the Church of Jesus Christ was born and so we celebrate the birthday of the Church on Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit is so important in the life of the Christian. In the Holy Spirit we have eyes to see the truth of the gospel; we have our minds open to understand, our hearts warmed to receive, and we have power to speak and proclaim that good news to others. I'm not sure we claim that power as we ought to, or as God intends for us to.

Jesus said you will be able to do much more than I have done because of this Advocate. That is a powerful promise and I believe it is ours to claim. Something for us to consider and pray about, don't you think?

We would never think we might do something more powerful or significant than Jesus did, but I think Jesus was saying because of the Holy Spirit the good news would spread so much further than the physical Jesus was able to go.

As his followers, we embrace the power we have with his Spirit and we are able to reach so many more; we are able to offer comfort and encouragement. We are able to share the faith with many others; to be one who comes alongside another as we are guided by the Holy Spirit.

But on this day, this weekend of remembering those who died, both as heroes and simply as loved ones who have had influence in our lives, we can give thanks and be grateful for the “one who comes alongside us” ... the Advocate, the Comforter.

I would like for you take a moment to write on the card you have in your bulletin. Write down a person or something else that has been a loss for you. For instance, I would write “my mother.”

You might write “my husband or wife or child” or you might write “my job, or my marriage or a significant relationship.” Don’t sign it. Just write something and then we will gather them and ask God’s blessing and give thanks for the one who walks alongside us ... the Holy Spirit.

Take time to write on the cards. Ushers gather them up and bring them forward.

Say a prayer of blessing and thanks.

There is one other part to having one who walks along side. In our Christian lives we have the Holy Spirit abiding in us. As the Church, we are a Community of Spirit Living people.

We have such blessings in each other! We are called and drawn together to be the physical ones who walk alongside another, visibly living out the Holy Spirits encouragement and comfort.

Ten years ago today my dear mother passed from this life to eternal life. And I remember feeling so lost and stunned and motherless. But it was through the comfort and encouragement of Christian friends who were there – just present – who represented Jesus to me in a spiritual, loving way that I was able to heal and be encouraged and to go on.

So often we don’t know what to say to someone who has lost a loved one. But it is not so much what is said, I think, as it is being present. Walking alongside the one who is hurting. Reminding them by our presence that they are still alive and that they will be ok. They are loved.

We often know and feel the Spirits presence with us ... even when we are alone. But, it is in our praying for one another and other acts of kindness that we are able to physically see and know the Spirit of Truth among us. That is one of the great purposes of the Church that we belong to.

And so, I will take this basket of cards and will have it for you to pick one as you go out today. You are invited to participate in the activity of the *Paracletos* – the Holy Spirit – as you pray for the person and the loss written on the card. Lift them up that God might heal them, comfort them, encourage them and open their eyes that they might see the truth of Jesus’ promise – “I will not leave you.”

Thanks be to God for the Advocate, the Comforter, the One who comes along side us every moment of our day and night. Amen.

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