

## **"The Advocate Comes"**

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

May 31, 2009, Pentecost

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard

Zion West Walworth and the Walworth United Methodist Churches

### **John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

<sup>26</sup>When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup>You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

<sup>12</sup>I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Prayer.

It is human nature to find a mentor, be attracted to a guide, to seek out a counselor. It is a life long search that precedes the cradle and extends to the grave.

The search for a mentor begins between a child and their mother. Consciousness begins in the womb, the watery environment, dark and without form. Complete dependence is established; nourishment, warmth, protection, even the caresses of love binds together mother and child. Through the waters a child emerges and the relationship changes, grows, expands. A mother's love envelops her child unlike any other. The mother teaches; through song, facial expressions, tone of voice. Mother is the primary, first and most important mentor anyone will ever have.

It extends to Father, older sisters and brothers. Babies learn quickly that the world is composed of more than just a mother. There is tenderness and love to

be found in different people; those who are most frequently within their experience. It is the deeper voice of the father that hums when placing the child in the car seat, that grimaces when changing the diaper, that is awkward, yet loving, while feeding, holding, and burping. It is the same one who teaches bathing techniques, how to swing a baseball bat, pay attention to homework, and keep quiet in church. It is the sibling who teaches how to deal with competition; be it how to get served at the supper table, get in line at the bathroom, or get that extra hug and praise from parents.

Our search for guidance grows in ever increasing circles; to teachers, a special counselor, pastor, or friend. Our world explodes with participation in school, church, and community activities. We seek out people who possess wisdom, who seem to know how to get things done, who demonstrate competence in everything they seem to attempt. We find that special teacher who takes us under their wing, that pastor who takes interest in youthful activities, that Sunday school teacher who teaches us bible stories, the coach of the volley ball or softball team.

The vast majority of our mentors, guides, and advocates are good people, with pure motives, and unblemished intentions. Some become life long friends, soul mates, confidants. These people are God's gifts of grace to us and our lives.

However, there comes a time when the awareness of human frailty and sin brings disappointment and disillusionment. It is a painful awakening. People we hold in high esteem fail our trust, break a relationship, cause mistake, muck and muddy community standards, demonstrate to the whole world that they have feet of clay. Mentors sometimes cause harm or lead astray.

If one can push through the disappointment of the human condition, our search leads the patient and persistent soul to the divine, to an awareness of the whisper of God's spirit in our lives.

A lifetime of plunging to the spiritual depths, discerning the movement of God, results in a developing awareness that, if you surrender control, through the works of the Spirit, God will guide you.

Experience is a good teacher, both good and bad, because you will learn that while humans sometimes fail you, God will never fail you. He will guide you. This guidance will lead you through the simple decisions in life. And the guidance of the Holy Spirit will lead you through the arid places, the trials and temptations, the major decisions you will face as you go through life's passages.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time in the future when he would be physically absent. However, he assured them that he

would send the Holy Spirit, his Spirit, to be his divine presence in our lives. Because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who will offer guidance, direction, and strength.

Jesus calls his Spirit “the Advocate,” or *Paraclete* in the Greek. The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit is also called Comforter, Encourager, and Advocate. This is the first of five promises Jesus makes in the Gospel of John to send the Spirit. Jesus tells his disciples (John 14:15-17) <sup>15</sup>“If you love me, obey my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you the Paraclete, who will never leave you. <sup>17</sup>He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.” For us here today, the Spirit is our guide, our mentor, our counselor. He will guide you. Without error or motive, the Spirit of Christ will lead you into all truth.

Jesus sends the Advocate to his disciples. Specific to our Gospel today, we learn that his reason is simply to prove the world wrong about sin, to support righteous living, and to warn of impending judgment.

### **Proving the World Wrong About Sin**

How does Jesus describe sin? He says, “<sup>9</sup>about sin, ... they do not believe in me.” Sin includes the uncompromising, disbelief that Jesus is the Son of God, who atoned for our sins, who rose from the dead bringing us everlasting life. It’s one thing to have never experienced Christ. It’s a far more serious affair, a sinful affair, to have received the witness and to intentionally walk away from Christ.

Following Christ is the appropriate response to the Holy Spirit’s encouragement. It started with the initial curiosity our parents had to bring us to baptism. The Spirit whispered. The water rippled. The baptismal water that initiated us into Christianity made the Spirit move. We come to the realization during confirmation that we have been claimed by God Almighty. This realization has released the Spirit in our life, giving us every necessary benefit and grace. We now have the Spirit of Truth within us; mentoring, empowering, sustaining, guiding, blessing, loving.

### **Supporting Righteous Living**

Jesus tells his disciples that we are given the Spirit to live in righteousness. God desires our attention and adherence to God’s laws. It is the divine desire to love God and to love neighbor. But we can’t do it alone. We require the guidance of the Spirit *to do the will of the Spirit*. When we live in harmony with others through adherence to human laws, in harmony with God through adherence to God’s laws, then we are living in harmony with the Spirit’s divine initiative. Righteousness can only result when our desire is united with the Spirit’s will.

### **Warning of Impending Judgment**

Jesus tells his disciples that the Spirit is sent to prepare us for impending, certain judgment. The time of judgment will be the opportunity when our faith and trust in everything other than God will be revealed: the confidence of a good job or large bank account, the hope of a winning lottery ticket or poker hand, the pride of authority, power, or control. The Spirit will reveal to us "the things that are to come," as Jesus said. With the Spirit's guidance we can head off judgment. We can pay attention and be properly prepared.

We can worship the gods of money, power, and pride, or, we can worship the Lord our God, in who resides all our dependence. We can follow people and public opinion, or, we can follow Christ, who gives us the Spirit of Truth. Who will you worship? Who will you follow? Will you stand condemned or justified?

With time comes experience. With maturity comes a deepening spiritual life. If we are fortunate, we learn by observing the mistakes of others. Often times we learn by the school of hard knocks. When blessed we are privileged to be guided by the Spirit's direction and revelation, it's whisper in our ear, it's thought in our mind, it's vision in our sleep, it's presence in our heart.

With experience we learn to place our faith, hope, and trust in Christ, and not so much with people or human institutions. As I reflect upon my own life, I can recall the many mentors who have shepherded me: mostly for the good, but with an occasional disappointment here and there. I have been blessed with many wonderful guides who have loved me, starting with my mother, throughout my life. It has only been the rare occasion when trust has been betrayed and I have been hurt. I have enjoyed the privilege of exceptional teachers, counselors, and pastors, yet, there has been occasions when one or more has fallen into the vat of human sin.

It's not so much that they failed. My own sinful nature and failures have taught me that we are all frail when it comes to the human condition. What has changed within me is the fact that I don't hold others up to such high expectations as I once did. I find myself more willing and more frequently placing myself in the palm of God's hand; allowed myself to be more open to the guidance of His Spirit, to listen with a little more clarity, and to respond with a little more faithful confidence. This requires a willingness to risk, to push the envelop of faith.

Beloved members and friends of Zion, may Pentecost ignite the Spirit within your soul. May Pentecost call you to push the envelop of faith. The dawning of this new day is an opportunity to be led by a new Mentor, the Divine Advocate, the Holy Spirit of Truth. Listen to it's whisper and it's thoughts. Watch for it's vision. Be aware of it's presence. Follow it's will. And you will grow deep, and deeper still, in the Christian life. God bless, and keep you, now and evermore. Amen.