

“Deep the Breath”

John 15: 26–27; 16:4b–15

Pentecost, 2006

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John 15: 26–27; 16:4b–15

²⁶“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. ²⁷You 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. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

⁷Nevertheless 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. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. ¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When 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. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Prayer.

A metaphor is defined as “a figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity”¹ A common metaphor is William Shakespeare’s famous line from “As You Like It”²

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances;

Of course the world is not literally a stage. That would be impossible. Shakespeare tells us that it is like a stage, and we can apply certain attributes of a stage to the world to bring about added meaning – people are actors, people enter and exit throughout the

¹ As found at <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/metaphor>

² William Shakespeare, As You Like It, 2/7

production, a skit guides the action, etc. Hopefully, you get the idea.

Developmental psychologists tell us that research has shown that pre-adolescence children have not yet developed the cognitive ability to understand metaphor. Our awareness of, and ability to make sense of, metaphor comes to us gradually in our adolescence years.

This is very important to educators. You can't teach the interpretation of Shakespeare to a second grader. This fundamental concept of developmental psychology is equally important to Christian educators, too. The language of faith is filled with metaphor: "Jesus is the Good Shepherd," "God is light," "He is a rock," "divided tongues as of fire appeared among them," "the Advocate will come."

This is why we teach Bible stories to our children when they are young. Children need to learn the story of faith. And in their adolescence, we make a change over in Sunday school and confirmation curriculum, and we begin to ask our youth what those stories mean.

Youth have an added tool in their toolbox to make understanding of the world, their faith, and how it all fits together. Suddenly the light bulb is turned on when the story of Solomon is experienced new once again. Is it a story about King Solomon being ready to cut a baby into two pieces, to divide the body between the two women who claimed to be the mother, just like we learned in 2nd grade? No. The story is about the justice of God. It is fair and shows no favoritism. It is filled with wisdom, wisdom beyond human design. It is merciful in every aspect. This is what the Wisdom of Solomon, and the story of two mothers and a baby, is all about.

I've laid this foundation regarding metaphor on this confirmation and Pentecost Sunday for a reason. We have new members of our congregation! Each of the confirmands are youth, stretching and growing into adolescence, abilities, rights, and responsibilities.

For you, I hope and pray that you use the new developmental tools from your toolbox to take a new and fresh look at the Bible and the language of your developing faith. The Bible will begin to appear like a new creation, filled with previously overlooked and misunderstood truths, insights, and wisdom. In fact, it is my experience and observation that new insights into Biblical narratives continue to reveal themselves throughout all the seasons of a person's life. The only way the Bible becomes stale and dusty is when it isn't opened, when it's shelved and forgotten.

In today's Gospel lesson, the evangelist St. John employs a metaphor that Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit, whose coming we celebrate this day. Jesus uses the word "Advocate" – a metaphor that I hope and pray will bring you meaning and assurance all your days.

An advocate is one who speaks for another; Implicit in the concept is the notion that the represented lacks the knowledge, skill, ability, or standing to speak for themselves.³ Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit comes to us as our Advocate, so that we may testify our faith to the world. We don't need to worry about having the words to speak. We don't need to be concerned with being able to articulate our beliefs, faith, or call. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will give you all the words, the patient guidance, all the direction that is necessary to live a life of faith and witness.

Jesus tells us that the Advocate will reveal all that is necessary about sin, righteousness, and judgment. It will guide you into all the truth (John 15:12). This should come as comfort and assurance to you.

There are many things that will lie to you, spread falsehoods to you throughout your life. The greed of money, the envy of accumulating things, the temptations of power, authority, and ego – these are just some of the lies the world tempts us with.

Know this: the Advocate will guide you as you face each of these circumstances. You'll experience the Holy Spirit's influence in your conscience, in your thoughts, in your prayers, in your reflections upon the Bible, in the words of others, sometimes even in the words of a pastor.

But the decision still remains up to you. The Advocate will guide you, but it won't control you. It still is up to you to make good choices in this world.

The question may have already popped into your mind: "But how will I know the difference between being guided by the Advocate and being tempted by sin?"

Jesus tells us that the criteria by which the Holy Spirit is known is that the Spirit will always glorify him (John 15:14). So ask yourself, "Does this decision bring glory to Christ and to his kingdom?" or "Does this decision bring glory to myself, or sow the seeds of sin and evil, or bring hatred and hurt to God's children?" Those decisions that glorify Christ are the work of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, which each of us have been given.

This is good news! This is comforting to us when we face the big decisions in life, as well as when we face the hundreds of small daily decisions. The Advocate is with you, will guide you, will give you the words. Should I go to this college or that college? Or maybe take a year off to get some experience? Am I ready to propose marriage to my girlfriend, or wait, or seek someone else? Should I take this job, or that job, or wait for another job? Should we have another baby, or be satisfied with the children we have?

³ As found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advocate>

All these major decisions in life are influenced by the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Beloved members of the confirmation class, and Laura, today we welcome you into our fellowship. It is a fellowship of gracious and loving people, every one of which recognizes the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Spirit first came to us at the Pentecost, two thousand years ago, and it has never left us. It is recognized at our baptism. It is kindled through our development. And today, you have claimed it for your own.

My prayer this day is that you will be so moved to make the Advocate your Advocate throughout your life. God bless and keep you, in the protective mercy and care of the Holy Spirit.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me this day. Amen.