

Sixth Sunday of Easter
 May 14, 2023
 John 14:15-17

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the advantages of attending a Lutheran elementary school is that you get to learn Lutheran hymns. One of the hymns I learned as a child is the hymn we just sang: “Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid.” In the old Lutheran Hymnal there is a word that shows up twice in this hymn. It shows up at the beginning of stanza 2: O Source of uncreated light, The Father's promised Paraclete, and again at the end of the doxology in stanza 4: And equal adoration be, Eternal Paraclete, to Thee. The first time that I saw this hymn, I wondered, “What in the world is a Paraclete.” The hymn is about the Holy Spirit, and the context of the hymn clearly indicates that the Holy Spirit is a paraclete. But what does that mean? Well today’s Gospel gives us the chance to learn about this word.

Once again, we are in the upper room with Jesus and the disciples on the night that Jesus was betrayed. In the Gospel we heard today, Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 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.” (John 14:16–17) This is Jesus promising to ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit already dwelt in the disciples even as He spoke with them.

Now, if you look at verse 16, you will see that the word Helper is capitalized. This is one of those places where the translator deserves extra credit. You see, the original Greek for this word is παράκλητον. Παράκλητον comes from two words. The root is the verb καλέω which means “I call.” The prefix παρα means alongside or next to. A παράκλητον is someone whose calling is to be beside you ... to stand with you. Παράκλητον is the origin of the word paraclete in the hymn. A paraclete is someone whose calling is to be beside you.

Now, if you are in a court of law, the one who is beside you is your lawyer. In this context, your lawyer is your paraclete. If you are deep in grief, the one who is beside you is a comforter. In this context, the comforter is your paraclete. If you are struggling with a project, the one who is beside you helps you with the project. In this context, the helper is your paraclete. If you find yourself stranded in an empty parking lot at 2:00 a.m. on a bitter cold winter morning, the one who will get out of the comfort of a warm cozy bed to give your battery a jump is your paraclete. If you are on a battlefield, the one who throws his helmet on the grenade and then falls on the helmet is your paraclete. If you are wounded in battle, the medic is your paraclete. If you are mortally wounded in battle, the one who stays with you so that you don’t die alone is your paraclete. You can see that the word paraclete is a very full and powerful word.

So, what does the translator do when he comes across the word παράκλητον and the editor in charge of the translation informs him that most of the people who will read this do not know what the word paraclete means? The poor translator must study the context and decide. Does he translate this as helper, advocate, intercessor, counselor, comforter, or any of the other words that might fit the context? It can be a real challenge.

Now that you know about the word paraclete, we can put it where it belongs in the text. Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever, 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.”

Jesus then went on to say, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. Here Jesus was speaking of the next few days. Later that evening, Judas would lead a detachment of guards from the temple to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. In less than 24 hours, Jesus would die on a cross. He would no longer be with the disciples as He was before. The Eternal Paraclete would dwell with them and in them as they grieved the death of their Lord.

This is but one way that the Holy Spirit would be their paraclete. Later on, Jesus would tell them another way in which the Holy Spirit will be their paraclete. In verse 26, Jesus will promise, “The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” This is Jesus’ promise that when the disciples bear witness to their time with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will watch over what they say and improve their memories so that their words will be accurate and authoritative. This is one of the verses that give us confidence that the writings of the Apostles are the inspired Word of God.

So, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples and He promises Him to us as well. Nevertheless, there is still a little detail that is important in the words Jesus used. Jesus did not say, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you the Paraclete, to be with you forever.” NO, He said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another** Paraclete, to be with you forever.” To say that the Holy Spirit is another Paraclete means that there is more than one paraclete. Jesus Himself is the first Paraclete that the Father sent. He is the Paraclete who came to save us from our sins by becoming a servant ... a servant who sacrificed himself on a cross.

Earlier in this sermon, I described a soldier who threw himself on a grenade as a paraclete to his comrades. Jesus is an even greater paraclete than this. A grenade brings death here in time. Sin brings death in eternity. Jesus put Himself between you and the eternal death of sin by living a perfect, innocent life and then allowing men to attach Him to a cross. By His death, He became our paraclete who rescues us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He has given assurance that He is our paraclete by rising from the dead. God the Father has called Jesus to our side to be our paraclete ... to rescue and protect us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

On the other hand, neither you nor I could know anything about Jesus as our paraclete, or believe on Him, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. That is why it is so important for the Father to give another Paraclete. It is important for the Spirit of truth to dwell with you and be in you. For it is the Holy Spirit who calls you by the Gospel and enlightens you with His gifts. He calls you by the words of the Gospel when you hear it and read it. He calls you by the wet Gospel of Holy Baptism when water is combined with God’s Word according to Christ’s command. He places the Gospel in your mouth as you receive the true body and blood of the Lord as you eat the bread and drink of the cup of the Lord’s Holy Meal.

The first Paraclete, Jesus Christ Himself, purchased and won us from sin, death, and the power of the devil with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He gives us the promise of life forever in heaven with His resurrection from the dead. The other Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, offers this forgiveness, life, and salvation to us through the Gospel. It is this other Paraclete who gives us the faith that believes and receives the gifts that the first Paraclete won for us. As these two paracletes work together, they transform us from disciples of the world into disciples of Jesus Christ.

Not everyone is excited about this. Jesus said, "The world cannot receive [the Spirit of Truth], because it neither sees him nor knows him." By nature, all people are born into this world as aliens. Even before we are born, we are all enemies of God. We have no desire to know God. As long as we are part of the sinful world, we neither hear nor see this Paraclete. It is as if He does not even exist.

When the disciples of the world saw Jesus die on the cross, they celebrated. They thought, "That is the end for that troublemaker," and they saw Him no more. We who believe in Jesus Christ know better. As Jesus said in today's Gospel, "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me."

The world can no longer see Jesus for it is spiritually blind. We who have the other Paraclete ... the Holy Spirit ... know the real presence of Jesus not only in the sacraments, but also in the rest of His Divine Service as well as in our day-to-day lives. We are not spiritual orphans, but Jesus is always with us.

Today's Gospel tells you of the blessings you receive from the Other Paraclete ... the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit offers to us the blessings Jesus bought for us with His suffering, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit offers forgiveness, life, and salvation to us through faith in Jesus Christ. Through this faith, God adopts us into His family. We become brothers and sisters of Christ and children of our Heavenly Father. God is with us in this life and, when this life is over, He will take us to our eternal home because He has forgiven all our sins. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.