

“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’⁶ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:5-11)

The Counselor Has Come

“Well, Counselor, are you ready to begin?” That sounds like a line from a TV show, doesn’t it? I don’t really know how realistic it is, but on TV, judges are always calling lawyers “counselor.” Most of us have seen so much TV that we understand what the term means. It’s different from a therapist or an advisor. Like therapists and advisors, lawyers do give advice. But a lawyer does one more thing: he represents his clients in court and advocates or speaks for them. In our gospel lesson for this morning, Jesus promised to send the Counselor to his disciples. The Greek word he used means an advocate or a person who speaks for someone else. Today, we’re celebrating the fulfillment of that promise. I realize that some people think that today is Mother’s Day. And, I guess there might be some truth to that. But in the church, today is Pentecost, the day we celebrate Jesus sending the Advocate from heaven to us. My friends, **the Counselor has come.**

I.

The Counselor is the Holy Spirit. In the verses right after our text Jesus says that the Counselor doesn’t speak on his own; he speaks the message of the Father and the Son to us. Every lawyer represents a client. Who does Holy Spirit represent? Not us. Jesus himself does that – in fact, the Bible uses the same Greek word to say that Jesus is our Advocate. He pleads our case before his Father. But when Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Counselor, he was teaching us that the Spirit speaks to us for God and for Christ. Jesus promised that because his time on this earth was almost over. But he wasn’t going to leave us alone, even for a minute. Today, **the Counselor has come. He came from Jesus.**

Jesus did not say these words on the day of Pentecost. We heard about that day in our second lesson this morning. Jesus spoke these words on Maundy Thursday, almost two months before the day of Pentecost. Jesus had dropped a bombshell on his disciples: this was their last night together. Never again, would they gather in this world in the way they had been for the last three years. In less than two months, the disciples would not see him anymore. They would have to wait for heaven to have the kind of intimate relationship with the Lord that they had gotten used to. They were stunned. Jesus said, **“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’”** They were just too sad to ask any more questions.

Jesus’ announcement doesn’t stun us like it did them. But we can, perhaps, imagine how disappointed they were and how much all this hurt. Jesus understood that, so he dealt with them very gently. He truly cared about these men. He knew them better than they knew themselves. He knew what they needed that night: the gospel. They needed to hear the promise that all of this really was a part of God’s plan to bring them home to heaven.

Jesus gave them that promise. He said, **“It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”** The Counselor, the Holy Spirit would come after Jesus left them. According to God’s plan, it’s the work of the Holy Spirit to nurture faith, to establish the Christian Church on earth and to spread it to all nations. Jesus needed to complete his job of dying and rising and then send the Spirit for the good of his people here. Who is the Holy Spirit? It’s kind of surprising how much confusion there is about him in the world today. Some people believe that the Spirit isn’t a “he” at all – rather, this is just a poetic way of talking about God’s power. But the Spirit is God. He is one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. Again and again, the Bible speaks about him as a being with thoughts and emotions and a will. And the Bible speaks of the Spirit alongside of the Father or the Son.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended with power on the first congregation of believers and gave them the gifts they needed to do the work he set before us. We still have that power. We don’t speak in languages we haven’t learned anymore, the way the disciples did on that first day. But every gift to do ministry – to

preach, to teach, to administer the church – is a gift of the Spirit. Sometimes, he takes gifts we already had and he dedicates them to the Lord. Other times, he gives gifts we didn't have. But he gives it all. And that's true for you too. The love we have for each other, our dedication to his work, the offerings and the time we give – all that happens because the Holy Spirit is still coming to us in the gospel.

How do we get his power? Most of us probably feel that we don't have nearly enough of it. How often do we feel guilty about the lives we lead? How often do we feel that we have failed to be the Christians God calls us to be, let alone to serve to extend his kingdom? How many of us really are satisfied with the time that we put in and the effort we dedicate to the Lord? How many of us feel guilty because we don't dedicate enough money to our congregation?

Pentecost is about God's solution. The solution starts with understanding what the problem really is: we're sinners. That means we're weak. It means we're out of focus. It means that it's too easy for us to make excuses about our service and it's too hard for us to commit ourselves to serving the Lord. The Holy Spirit descended on his Church on the day of Pentecost to lead us to Jesus who died and rose to take all that sin away. He paid for our laziness. He died and paid for our excuses. He suffered the hell that the sin in our hearts deserves. And he set us free. God says to you and me today, "I forgive you."

As forgiven children, God wants us to serve him. The Holy Spirit came on the church in power so that we can do that. But true Christian service is not only what we do here. It's living as God's children. It's not just the money we give here or the time we spend here. God's people love their children and bring them up to know their Savior. God's people are faithful employees, even when their boss is a jerk, because we're God's servants even at a work. God's people live for God so we dedicate a generous portion of our time and money and effort to the Lord through our congregation.

But it all comes back to what God has done for us. The Holy Spirit came because our sinful hearts are too weak and empty to live for God. He changes us by constantly bringing us back to Jesus. That's the heart of all that we do here. In fact, the most important thing that happens in this building is not that we serve God, but that God serves us. Jesus served us by dying and rising for us and by sending his Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit serves us by proclaiming God's love and forgiveness to us. He renews our faith and through that faith, we live for God. He prepares us to serve him – whether we're in the ministry or not. Serving the Lord is not about the natural abilities or smarts that I've got and you don't. It's about the Spirit working in us through the gospel. That's where his gifts come from.

II.

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit is called the "Silent Partner of the Trinity." He doesn't point to himself a lot. His work is to show us Jesus. **The Counselor has come. He came to proclaim Jesus' message.**

Jesus said, "**When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.**" The Spirit works through our preaching. When we preach God's word, it always has an effect. There is no more powerful force on earth than the word of God. When we preach that word, the world around us stands condemned. That's an essential part of what we have to do. Jesus says that the world is convicted of guilt in regard to sin because people don't believe in him. Sometimes, we operate under a false notion: we think that some sins are worse than others. There is a sense in which that's true. Obviously, some sins do much more damage than others. Child abuse is far worse in most cases than a simple lie. Murder does much more damage most of the time than shoplifting does.

But there's another way to look at sin: all sin leads to hell. When you look at it that way, all sin is the same. The worst possible thing that can happen to us is to spend all eternity separated from God in pain and agony. Because God looks at sin that way, Jesus died for all sin. He died for child molesters just as much as he died for gossipers. He died for murderers just as much as he died for Christians who go to church every Sunday but slip up in our day to day walk with God. Jesus died for it all. That means that there is only one sin left that sends people to hell: unbelief. Only when you reject what Jesus has done and insist you're a good person and you'll do all right by yourself do you go to hell. Sadly, the world is full of people who don't believe in Christ.

Jesus also sent the Spirit to convict the world in regard to righteousness, because he says, "**I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.**" Because all sin is equal, because we were all born as sinners who can't possibly do anything that pleases God, Jesus came into this world to be the one person who was holy. He was righteous in God's sight. He never looked down on those people out there who aren't as good as we are. He never forgot that he's a child of God and indulged his sinful desires. He had no sinful desires because

his heart was pure. Jesus was perfect in our place. Now, he has left this world. Sadly, the devil takes full advantage of that to convince people that perfection is impossible, so why even try? Do your best. God will be happy you tried. But our God says no! To get into heaven you must be perfect.

Finally, the Counselor convicts the world in regard to judgment because **“the prince of this world now stands condemned.”** The devil is the prince of this world. He’s been fighting a losing war with God since the Garden of Eden. Jesus said these words on the night his own suffering began. He said these words knowing that within hours, Roman soldiers and temple guards would torture him and spit on him, knowing that over the next twenty-four hours, he would suffer hell itself on the cross and then die. But he also knew that when he rose, the devil would be defeated forever.

The devil constantly accuses us before God. He says, “God, you have to send these sinners to hell!” And he rejoices every time a sinner goes to hell. But Jesus stood in our place – in the place of every sinner born – and he suffered what we deserve, and God set us free. Today, only those who follow the devil, only those who throw away what Jesus has done, are lost.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world. Only he can strike terror into a sinful heart. He only does that through us, through the law that we preach – through the fire and brimstone that so many today resent. He calls us to preach that law. That law hurts. It breaks hearts and terrifies consciences. Then the Spirit brings relief through us. He gives us the gospel to announce forgiveness. Through that message, he moves unbelievers from death to life, from unbelief to faith.

And the only question for us today is why don’t we do it? Are we too scared? Do we think that we have to do something more than talk about Jesus? Or do we lack confidence in the power of the word? Do we think that it’s up to us to convince them? It isn’t! That’s why Jesus gave us the Spirit. Do we think that it’s too embarrassing to talk about Jesus? Are we afraid of what people will think of us? Are we too caught up in what we want to care?

You know what? We’re still sinners. We prove that when we don’t trust the gospel. We prove it when we don’t care enough about the gospel or enough about other people to share it. That sin proves that we’re no better than the worst sinner in prison for life. And we deserve hell. But Jesus died and paid for us. The only sin left that sends anyone to hell is unbelief. The Holy Spirit came to work through the gospel and give us faith. We have that faith today, by the grace of God. By his grace, we will trust and care and share that life-giving message.

That’s what Pentecost means. Jesus kept his promise to send the Spirit to us. He kept his promise to sustain our faith through the Spirit working through the word. Trust in Jesus and his love. Trust in Jesus to keep his promises and strengthen your faith through the gospel. Trust him and hear that word. Trust him and join in proclaiming it. It is the word of Christ brought to you by the Counselor, God’s spokesman. There is no greater power in earth or heaven. Amen.