

Sunday Lent #2 Sermon
(03/05/23)

Text – John 14:15-31

Theme – “The Helper”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The opening verses of our text are some of the richest Trinitarian verses in all of Scripture. All three Persons are mentioned (although in a somewhat veiled way) and all three Persons are seen in relation to one another, as well as their unity and work. Listen again to what Jesus promises:

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.

“I will ask the Father...” Of course, there we have both the First Person of the Trinity (the Father) and the Second (Jesus, the Son) clearly and explicitly mentioned. *“And He will give you another Helper...”* The Helper, as we all know, is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. And, we are told, this Spirit comes as the gift of the Father, at the request/prayer of the Son.

So, the Holy Spirit comes, at the prayer of the Son, as the gift of the Father. And this Helper comes as the *“Spirit of Truth”* – and remember what Jesus had just told the Twelve: He (Jesus) is the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life. That is, this Spirit is *His* Spirit, just as He is also the Spirit of the Father. The three Persons are one God. They are not three separate Gods, nor are the Son and Spirit lesser than the Father. No, they are one. It’s a mystery too great even for the angels, much less than for sinful and limited man. None of us can grasp it or comprehend it, so we should not be too surprised that the Twelve also are confused and lost. That changes nothing though: there is one God, Trinity in Unity.

Before they sinned, Adam and Eve knew God. They knew the Trinity, they knew His unity. They knew God to be their loving Father who gave them all things. They knew that He is perfect Love. But that knowledge was destroyed and lost once they sinned. It was replaced with a faulty, warped, distorted understanding which saw God only as angry Judge. One who was out to “get them” for their sin. Now, that view of God’s anger was partially based in truth: God HAD said that sin must be punished. Punished with death, in this life and for eternity. So it was that they hid from Him. Lied to Him, trying to save their skins. Tried to cover over their sins themselves with fig leaves.

And it is only when God comes to them and promises to send a Savior – the Son – that they begin to recover true knowledge of God. And THAT is the work of the Holy Spirit: to give faith in God’s love and salvation. Adam and Eve believed, they trusted that promise only because the Spirit, the Helper, was given them in that first Gospel promise.

What we see in Adam and Eve (after their sin and before God comes to them in the Garden), that is the way ALL people see God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. All people have that same perverted view of God. So it is that people try to appease God themselves. Some try to buy His acceptance with gifts and offerings – think of the altars and sacrifices of the pagans. Others try to prove their “goodness” to Him by their imagined good works, as if such things could offset their sin. Others try to hide from Him by saying there is no God. But all these things merely show that sinful man does NOT know God rightly.

But it is in Jesus that we DO see Him as He really is. Yes, God knows our sin. He knows our failures. He knows we deserve nothing from Him but death and hell. But that is not where God will leave us. No. He loves us still! And so, just as He did in Eden for fallen Adam and Eve, so He does in the person of Jesus Christ – He comes to give us forgiveness and life.

Jesus is born for us, to be the perfect person that none of us can ever be ourselves. He lives under the commandments – and keeps them all perfectly. He does it all in our place, to give US the credit. Jesus' perfection is for you. What He does is put to your account. His righteousness is to cover you – infinitely better than those fig leaves of Adam, those sacrifices on the altars of history, those good works you want to present to God. *“Do this and live”* God says. Well, in Christ, it HAS been done. For you. And so, in Christ, you live.

And what about our sins? Does God just sweep them under the rug? Pretend they do not exist? Pat us on the head and say “well, at least you tried”? No. God is just. His Law is true. And so when that Law says that sin demands payment – death and hell – it is so. But Jesus has come to bear that punishment for you. He takes up your burden of sin – all of it – and He carries it to the cross. There HE suffers for it all. There HE suffers for all. The hell of each and every person, from Adam to the last person to be born, it is all there on Christ's back. And if it all is on Him (and it is), then it cannot be on you anymore. He is scorned and rejected, ridiculed and reviled, hated and abandoned – not you. He is forsaken and condemned, not you. He is damned, not you. The price has been paid, all of it, and sin is broken.

But not only did Jesus live for you, not only did He die for you, He also was raised for you. That is, on Easter He bursts forth from the tomb, alive. Victorious. Triumphant. Conqueror and Crusher of Satan. Defeater of death. Slayer of sin. He is God, after all, and so none of these things (sin/death/devil) could hold Him. And in His resurrection, we too are given eternal life. We too are conquerors of those enemies – not because WE have beaten them, but only because Christ has done so for us. His resurrection, like His Ascension, shows our future. We too will be raised again, to live forever with our Father. We too will ascend to rule all things as His children, just as it was in the beginning, in a new heaven and earth free/cleansed/purified of sin and its horrible effects. (pause)

All THAT is what Christ came to do. And in that work we see and know the Father. But it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit — the Helper that Jesus promises in our text — that we have any of it. Without Jesus we would not know the Father. But without the Spirit, we would not know Christ. That is His special work.

Jesus makes that clear, when He says later in our text:

But the Helper, 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. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.

Let's start with that last sentence: "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.*" The peace Jesus talks about is the peace He has made between God and man. The peace He won at such a great cost: His own suffering and death, His enduring our hell for us. Man's war with God has ended. Not, as you would expect, with our being crushed and defeated and killed, but by Jesus taking all that for us. He ends that war by sacrificing Himself. And so we have peace with God. Our sin is settled. Our conflict over. We have been forgiven and brought home.

And because we have that peace with God, we also have peace with one another. As Christians, we no longer try to beat and conquer and triumph over our neighbor. No, we love them. We forgive them. We sacrifice for them. As we have been given by God, so we now strive to give to others. Not to win heaven for ourselves, but because we already have it. And where we fail in any of that – where we sin against our neighbor, where we are slow to forgive them, where we fail to give and sacrifice for them – we flee back to Christ for salvation. And, because we have His peace given to us, He forgives. And He strengthens us for the future, to show forth His love.

Jesus has won that peace for us. But we have it only because the Spirit gives it to us and makes it our own. And He does that through the Gospel, in Word and Sacrament. That's what Jesus means when He says that the Spirit will bring to mind all that Jesus has said and done. There, in the Gospel,

the Spirit works. He creates faith. He sustains faith. He causes us to live our faith. We do none of it ourselves. It is ALL God's work and gift. That is what we confess in the Creed, isn't it? *“And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life...”*

The Lord and Giver of Life. The One who makes us alive by giving us Christ. The One who keeps us alive by keeping us connected/joined to Christ. And He does that through the Word and Sacraments. In baptism the Spirit has made you one with Christ. Adopted and washed clean by His blood. Called by name to be the Father's child and heir. Made a member of His Body, the Church. In the Word – whether that be the Bible itself, or its message taught by parents or teachers or pastors or others, or the Word in art and music – in the Word the Spirit teaches you who Christ is and what He has done for you. He burns into your head and heart the love of God, so that you never forget it. He opens your eyes to your new relationship with God, and with other people, as Christians. And in the Lord's Supper, the Spirit puts into your hand and mouth the very Body and Blood of Christ – given and shed for YOU.

In the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit helps you just as Jesus promised in our text. He calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps you with all Christians in the one holy Christian Church. He gives you what Christ has won, all those gifts that show forth the Father and His love.

You are not alone anymore – your Father is with you always. And He gives you countless brothers and sisters in Christ, to uplift and strength and encourage you. Satan no longer owns you – Christ has paid the price to set you free, and the Spirit tells you (He gives you) that freedom. Death no longer threatens you – Christ has delivered us from the grave, and the Spirit gives us that new and eternal life. (pause)

On that Maundy Thursday night Jesus gave much. At the celebration of the Passover, He gave thanks for the true Passover, when He – the very Lamb of God – would be sacrificed so that we would

be passed over from death to life. He took bread and wine, and gave the Twelve His Body and Blood as He instituted and gave the Lord's Supper. After supper He took a wash basin and towel to give His disciples cleansing and to point them to their cleansing of sin in His blood. Later, in Gethsemane, He gives Himself over into the hands of sinful men, to be crucified for our sin.

But none of those gifts would avail if not for THIS Gift, the Holy Spirit. He is given by the Father, at the prayer of the Son, to make US God's children again. To make Christ's sacrifice *ours*. To give us forgiveness and pardon and peace. Christ's peace. Just as Jesus promised, the Spirit dwells within you. And He gives you all things. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS – Nicene Creed
FE – Offertory