

## 1 Sermon, May 26, 2013

Texts: John 15:26-16:15,

Title: "The Holy Spirit as Advocate"

1. Advocate – one who works for us
2. Brings us to a sense of transcendence
3. Advocate tells us the truth; holds up a mirror
4. We can't bear it all at once
5. Keeps us from stumbling/guides us in the truth/integrity

### 1. Advocate – one who works for us

Today I want to look at what Jesus said in the gospel of John about the Holy Spirit. There are lots of things that could be said about the Holy Spirit, but these words are key words.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit "advocate" or some even translate it "friend."

"...But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is."

It's an intimate image of one who will walk with us. When we are discouraged, the Holy Spirit cheers us; when we are sick, the spirit is God's healing grace.

The idea, according to these words in the Gospel of John, is that Jesus had to die and rise again and ascend to heaven, and since he would be absent, God would send the Holy Spirit as almost a substitute for the living body of Jesus.

God would not abandon Jesus' followers. So the Holy Spirit was sent to take Jesus' place.

### 2. Brings us to a sense of transcendence

But you can imagine how the disciples might have felt. They had a living Jesus in the flesh – he told them he would be going away, but he would be replaced with an intangible Spirit. It must not have seemed like a complete replacement. It's like replacing beef stew with a promise of beef stew. Or maybe better, replacing a bowl of steaming beef stew with a can of beef stew on a high shelf.

It's not quite the same.

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Charles Taylor has written a book called "A Secular Age," which speaks to this. In his book, he talks about the Christian worldview as being one balanced between God's immanence and God's transcendence.

Immanence is a perception of God close at hand, comforting, walking with us. Think of a horizontal connection. (like a hug)  
Transcendence is an experience of God as awesome, too big for comprehension, omnipresent and all-knowing. Think of a vertical connection. You can't reach.

When Jesus was with the Apostles, it was easy for them to experience God as immanent, because Jesus was physically with them, and taught them personally. Jesus listened and cared. (hug)

The apostles could also experience transcendence through Jesus. The miracles of Jesus were evidence of something totally beyond normal human experience, and they pointed the way to God as "more than" – God as awesome (gesture up).

With Jesus risen, and no longer in the flesh, and the Holy Spirit promised, the apostles must have felt a lack of immanence (horizontal). But the Spirit, especially at Pentecost, gave them a sense of transcendence (vertical).

If we lack an experience of the Holy Spirit, it is partly because we have not been trained to see the transcendent. We are not used to looking for the awe and wonder, looking for what is more than our senses can experience.

Prayer is a training ground for experiencing the transcendent. If we don't spend much time in prayer, we won't experience it much. Worship can also connect us to the transcendent.

Holy, Holy, Holy #64 – a transcendent hymn.

*God is merciful and mighty.*

*All the saints in heaven adore God, even angels – cherubim and seraphim - fall down and worship the Lord.*

*No one can compare to God.*

*God is perfect in power, in love and in purity.*

*All creation praises God!*

So the Holy Spirit is our advocate first by lifting our eyes to the transcendent, lifting us higher than our normal lives.

That's point one: transcendence.

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#### 3. Advocate tells us the truth; holds up a mirror

Point two is that the Holy Spirit is our advocate by being a good mirror.

This week I was reading a sermon by George Whitefield, one of John Wesley's co-workers, and a great preacher who attracted huge crowds. Whitefield talked about the Holy Spirit convincing us of sin. Whitefield said,

First, [the Spirit] convinces of sin; and generally of some enormous sin, the worst perhaps the . . . person ever was guilty of. Thus, when our Lord was conversing with the woman of Samaria, he convinced her first of her adultery: . . . With this there went such a powerful conviction of all her other actual sins, that soon after, "she left her water-pot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, and see a man that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

Thus our Lord also dealt with the persecutor Saul: he convinced him first of the horrid sin of persecution; "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Such a sense of all his *other* sins, probably at the same time revived in his mind, that immediately he died; that is, died to all his false confidences, and was thrown into such an agony of soul, that he continued three days, and neither did eat nor drink. This is the method the Spirit of God generally takes in dealing with sinners.

If the Holy Spirit is to be our advocate, the Holy Spirit must help us look at ourselves honestly. We must see all our own spiritual warts and blemishes: our unbelief, our vanity, our condemnation of others, our cruelty with words, our willingness to place our trust in the things of this world in a materialistic way.

If there is such a single outstanding sin in your life, it probably has something to do with selfishness, or with dishonoring a relationship.

The Holy Spirit helps us to see ourselves more clearly. But it is not just our sin that we need to see more clearly. It is also that we need to see the blessings and grace that God has given us.

God has given each of us some great gifts – some gifts of wisdom or kindness or generosity or encouragement. The New Testament has several lists of such gifts. Each of us has been given some gift by which we can do good in the world. It may be through your hard work or through your cheerfulness or through your deep desire to serve that God is glorified.

When the Holy Spirit helps us look at ourselves, we see ourselves as not only sinful, but also as gifted and capable.

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### 4. We can't bear it all at once

Jesus also said in this passage:

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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.

The Holy Spirit will not use a dump truck to give us knowledge all at once. No, God loves us enough not to overwhelm us with more knowledge than we can bear.

The Spirit will help us, bit by bit, to discover the immensity and awesomeness of God. The Spirit will help us, a little at a time to discover our own sinfulness and God's compensating gifts to us.

Bit by bit, we can grow in our faithfulness, as the Spirit leads us.

It reminds me of Psalm 139:6, in which the Psalm writer is marveling at God's transcendence, saying:

That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it's so high above me that I can't fathom it.

### 5. Keeps us from stumbling/guides us in the truth/integrity

Lastly, the Holy Spirit will keep us from stumbling and guides us in the truth.

This is a supposedly true story told by a grandfather:

When my grandson Billy and I entered our vacation cabin, we kept the lights off until we were inside to keep from attracting pesky insects. Still, a few fireflies followed us in. Noticing them before I did, Billy whispered, "It's no use Grandpa. Now the mosquitoes are coming after us with flashlights."

The Holy Spirit will act as a flashlight to show us the metaphorical tree roots that we might otherwise stumble over.

When Jesus in the Gospel of John speaks of "Truth" it is not as a creed or set of beliefs to agree to. Instead, it's truth in perception. Instead of being tricked by the appearance of things, or our own imagination, we see what is really there. Again, it's like walking in the dark. The Holy Spirit flashlight helps us to see that there are no boogie men in the woods, but there are plenty of trees and obstacles to watch out for.

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The Spirit shows us the truth of what grounds us. And what grounds us is not a set of suppositions, but a relationship with a loving and living God.

The Holy Spirit is an advocate; someone who is on our side – a friend who helps us overcome obstacles, who helps us see the truth, who helps us face the worst parts of ourselves and claim the best parts of ourselves. The Spirit connects us once again to a sense of transcendence, of God as awesome and great and beyond our imagination.

Thanks be to God.

“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. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” John 15:26-16:15, NRSV.

Graham writes that in 1910 E. Stanley Jones was released from the Lal Bagh church to do Conference evangelistic work. Jones’s first

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evangelistic work was among the low castes and outcastes of India as was the practice of virtually all Christian missionaries in India. However, he soon began his outreach to the intelligentsia. He enjoyed "energetic discussion/debate with the educated Hindus and Muslims but would readily admit that "in the final analysis, Christianity is NOT an intellectual proposition that can establish its own superiority over other religions by clever argument. Christianity is true because it reveals the truth of God's love for man in the person of Jesus Christ" (Graham, Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission).

If time, end with this story, told by E. Stanley Jones:

A Japanese lieutenant in World War 2 had just announced the end of the war to his ship when a US torpedo hit his ship, presumably from a submarine that had not been informed of the end of the war.

He had no injury through the war, but was made blind just after the war ended. He brooded over his condition and then one day decided on suicide. He stole out at night, a moonlit night, to throw himself under a passing train. As he was about to do it, someone saw him and yelled, "Look out, you're in danger!" He pulled back.

"Someone cares. There might be some kindness in the universe." That tiny ray of light that flashed in his heart from that voice that called out in the dark opened to him a possibility. Then a pastor became interested in him, took him by the hand, and led him to the church. He preached that morning on "Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Then and there he was converted by a surrender of himself and his blindness to Christ. He pulled straight out of that depression and inwardly was on top of his world. He said to himself: "I wonder if I could help handicapped people as this pastor has helped me. But no university will take a blind man." A Christian college did take him, however; his wife and his sister read the books to him. After graduation he set up a workshop for the handicapped. He became happy and adjusted and useful.

The Holy Spirit worked in his life to help him overcome obstacles, help him see the truth, and help him face the worst parts of himself and claim the best parts of himself. The Spirit connected him to a sense of transcendence.