

June 6, 2010
First Baptist Vancouver

Text: John 14:22-31; 16:13-16

Title: “The Witness of the Spirit – Part I”

(Continuing a series on

“The Space In Which He Calls Us to Follow”)

I want to talk with you today

about a Friend of mine.

I have known Him for a long time ... for decades now.

But over the past few years,

and especially since coming to serve with you,

He has become all the more precious to me.

I now know

that I simply cannot live without Him.

I cannot imagine life without Him.

I do not want to live without Him.

I am, of course, speaking about

the One Jesus is speaking about in the text we just read.

I am speaking about the One Jesus calls the Paraclete.

I am speaking about the Holy Spirit.

He has become so very precious to me.

As I know He is to many of you.

Let us review the context

in which Jesus first told His disciples
about my Friend and your Friend.

It was on the night before going to the cross.

Jesus had gathered the first community of followers together

for a meal,
for the Jewish Passover Meal.

During the meal

He took a loaf of bread,
gave thanks,
broke it,
and served it to the disciples, saying,
“This is My body, given for you.
Eat this in remembrance of Me.”

He then took a cup of wine,
gave thanks,
and handed it to the disciples, saying,
“This cup is the new covenant in My blood.
Drink of it all of you in remembrance of Me.”

He then told them what was initially devastating news.

“In a little while I am going away.”

He had come from the Father, as He put it.

And now He was going back to the Father.

“I am going away.”

He then spends the rest of the evening

preparing the first group of followers – and us –

to go on living in the absence of His physical presence.

Not in His absence, as we have seen over the past weeks.

But in the absence of His physical presence.

What caught them by even greater surprise,

was that Jesus claimed His “going away” was to their advantage!

How can that be?

How can it be to their advantage – and to our advantage –

that Jesus go away?

That we go on living in the absence of His physical presence?

“Because,” says Jesus,

“if I go away I will send the Paraclete to you.”

I will send the Holy Spirit to you.

I will send the Helper to you.

I will send the Comforter to you.

I will send the Advocate to you.

Who, says Jesus, will live with us.

And Who will live in us.

And as a result of the Paraclete living with us and in us,
we will not be alone in the absence of Jesus' physical presence.

Over the past few weeks – since Easter Sunday –

We have been exploring what I have called

“The space in which Jesus now calls us to follow.”

Obviously,

the space is filled with oxygen and hydrogen and nitrogen.

And with plants and animals and insects

and all kinds of micro-organisms.

And with automobiles and airplanes and skyscrapers.

And with electronic signals.

And principalities and powers, as the NT calls them.

And with people.

From all over the world.

And with responsibilities and demands.

With rival world-views and ideologies

and conflicting claims about what it means to be human.

AND with a Person.

A Friend.

My Friend.

And your Friend.

The precious Paraclete.

So, what is He doing in this space?

He is with us.

And He is in us.

Imagine that – in us!

What is He doing with us and in us in this space?

What He is doing is a function of the two titles Jesus gives Him.

“The Holy Spirit”.

And “the Spirit of Truth.”

“Holy Spirit.”

Who comes to holy-fy us.

Who comes to make us like the One Who sends Him,

like Jesus the Holy One.

This is what the writers of the rest of the NT emphasize.

When the Holy Spirit comes

He begins to change us, to make us holy.

Do not be afraid of the word “holy.”

Yes, the word conveys the idea of “purity.”

To be made holy is to be made pure.

But the word also conveys the idea of “wholeness.”

To be made holy is to be made whole.

Who would not want to be made whole?

What the rest to the NT emphasizes is that when the Paraclete comes

He goes to work with us and in us to make us like
 the One truly Whole Person who ever lived,
 like Jesus of Nazareth.

Who would not like to become like Him?

So the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians,
 speaks of the “Fruit of the Spirit,”

the kinds of character-traits that begin to emerge in us
 because of the Spirit living in us.

They are the character-traits of Jesus Himself!

Love, joy, peace,
 patience, kindness, goodness,
 faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Oh Holy Spirit ... bring it on!

Re-produce the character of Jesus in us!

And “the Spirit of truth.”

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth.

Who, says Jesus, “will guide you into all truth” (16:13).

A tremendous promise!

Jesus is saying that we are not left to find the truth on our own.

We are not left to figure out the truth on our own.

This promise means so much to me right now.

I often feel overwhelmed by the challenge of doing ministry
 at this time in world history.

How do we communicate the Gospel in our time?

In this city?

With all its conflicting truth-claims?

How do help lead this church right now?

Where are we to be putting our emphasis?

What are to be our priorities?

You in your businesses and responsibilities are asking similar questions.

What can I know what is really going on in my context?

How can I know the right path to take?

Oh blessed Paraclete!

“He will guide you into all truth,” says Jesus.

He will guide you on the path that gives life!

On that night before He gave Himself on the cross for the life of the world,

Jesus made four specific promises about the truth-work of the Paraclete.

Fulfilling these promises
is what is happening in the space
in which Jesus calls us to follow.

1. John 16, verse 14.

“He (the Paraclete) shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.”

Jesus repeats the promise in the next verse, John 16, verse 15.

**“All things that the Father has are Mine;
therefore I said, that He (the Paraclete) takes of Mine,
and will disclose it to you.”**

Disclose.

Earlier in the Upper Room Jesus has told the disciples,

“I will disclose Myself to you” (14:21).

I will make Myself known to you, real to you.

“How?” the disciples ask.

Through the work of the Spirit of truth, says Jesus.

Just as Jesus has come and disclosed His Father to us,

so the Paraclete comes and discloses Jesus to us.

What a promise!

We do not have to figure out Who Jesus is on our own!

Which we would never be able to do.

And which we would likely get wrong.

You see, the great passion of the Paraclete is Jesus.

Simple at that.

Which is why we do not find the Spirit telling us about Himself.

Someone has called the Spirit the shy member of the Trinity.

Never calling attention to Himself.

Not because He is in fact shy, but because He is pre-occupied with Jesus.

The Spirit knows Jesus.

The Spirit loves Jesus.

And it is His passion that we know Jesus.

And that we love Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit gets hold of us

we too become pre-occupied with Jesus.

It is so fun to see this happening in so many of your lives!

A number of you have said to me lately,

“I cannot get enough of Jesus!”

That is the clearest sign of the work of the Spirit!

Yes, the Spirit gives the gift of healing ...
and deliverance ... and miracles.

But the biggest sign that He has come and it at work

is that busy, tired, confused men and women

become pre-occupied with Jesus.

How does the Spirit make this happen?

Consider the other promises Jesus makes about His work.

2. John 14, verse 26.

“He will bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

In the absence of Jesus’ physical presence,

the Paraclete will help Jesus’ disciples remember what Jesus said.

Wonderful!

He will help disciples remember all that Jesus said.

I am having such a hard time remembering names ...

I meet so many people in so many different contexts.

That I will remember what Jesus said?

Can it really be?

Yes.

The Paraclete who loves Jesus and wants us to love Jesus

will see to it that we remember all that He said to us!

I agree with those who see this promise primarily fulfilled

in the writing of the Four Gospels.

The Spirit of truth

helped the eye-witnesses remember all that Jesus taught.

And helped the eye-witnesses pass on what they remembered.

The Upper Room discourse, John 13-17,

is itself a fulfillment of promise.

The Spirit of truth helped John remember all that Jesus taught that night.

The same is true of the other discourses, other speeches of Jesus in John.

The discourse on the Bread of Life in John 6.

The discourse on the Good Shepherd in John 10.

Fulfillment of the promise.

So are the great parables in Luke ...

Luke 15, the parable of the Prodigal Father.

Luke 10, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

So too the parables in Matthew ...

Matthew 13, the parable of the sower.

The parable of the mustard seed and leaven.

And in Matthew 5-7 Jesus' Sermon on the Mount!

Where would the world be without the Sermon on the Mount?

A fulfillment of promise!

On it goes.

The Paraclete helped the disciples remember.

How does He do it?

I do not know.

I do know that in the first century,

and in the Middle-Eastern context in the first century,

that would not be as difficult as it seems in our century.

The disciples grew up in an oral culture.

Where people listened more carefully.

And had an amazing capacity for retaining information.

In fact, in an oral culture one only knows if one remembers!

One of the rites of passage for a male in that day
was, to one night, sit around a fire
with the village elders,
and recount the history of the village,
in the exact words that the elders,
and the elders before them,
had used.

I saw the dynamics of oral culture are work in Manila.

One Sunday I was preaching the great hymn about Jesus
recorded in Philippians 2:5-11.

Three young University students were sitting in the front row.

They were obviously excited about what they were learning about Jesus.

But they were not taking any notes!

I thought to myself,

“This is important stuff ...
they ought to be writing it down.”

About three weeks after,

I ran into one of the students in the market.

He said to me,

“You remember the third point you made

about the hymn?

Remember how you put it?

And he recited my words exactly!”

So the writers of the Four Gospels.

They lived in an oral culture.

They lived by memory.

Now, I do not in any way mean to minimize the super-natural work of the Spirit.

It is just that in such a cultural context

“bringing to remembrance” is easy for me to conceive happening.

How the Spirit did it, I do not know.

But that it can happen, I have no trouble embracing.

So, when you pick up a copy of the Gospel according to John

you are reading the Gospel according to the Paraclete through John.

When you pick up a copy of the Gospel according to Luke

you are picking up a copy of the Gospel according to the Paraclete
through Luke.

Which is why we have those times

when it seems the Bible on the shelf is calling out “Pick me up.”

It is the Spirit,

Who loves Jesus and wants us to love Him,

calling us to open up His remembering of all Jesus said.

He did that for me just the other day.

The Paraclete seemed to call me to remember Jesus’ prayer in John 17.

The Paraclete seemed to want me to rest again

in all that Jesus asks the Father to do for His disciples.

It was if the Spirit was saying to me,

“Darrell ... remember what Jesus is praying for the people of First.

Remember what He is praying for your family.

Remember what He is praying for you!”

“Father ... keep them in Your name.”

“Father ... keep them from the evil-one.”

“Father ... I want them to be with Me where I am

that they may behold My glory.”

“He (the Spirit of truth) will bring to your remembrance all I have said” ...

all I have preached and prayed.

This leads to another promise Jesus made about the Spirit.

3. John 14, verse 26.

“He will teach you all things.”

To what does this refer?

In the Upper Room Jesus says a number of times,

“I have many more things to say to you,
but you cannot bear them now” (16:12).

The implication being

that later on they can bear “the more.”

And that later on there would be “more.”

I agree with those who see this promise

primarily fulfilled in the writing of the letters of the NT.

This promise is primarily fulfilled in the letters of Paul and Peter

and John and Jude

and the letter to the Hebrews.

What Jesus could not teach the disciples in the Upper Room

before going back to the Father

He taught after going to the Father

through the teaching ministry of the Paraclete.

“He will teach you all things.”

I take this to mean

that the Spirit would enable disciples

to begin to understand the implications of the events

involved in going to the Father.

Going to the Father involves

Crucifixion,

Resurrection,

and Ascension.

Jesus did not teach those implications

before the events

because the disciples would not have been able to grasp them.

The events had to happen first.

And after they took place,
 the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth,
 could begin to un-pack the truly cosmic implications
 of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

Every time we open one of the NT letters and read,
 we are reading the work of the Spirit of truth.
 That is why the letters "feel" like living words!
 Yes, the letters are the work of human writers:

Paul, Peter, John.

But they are also ... primarily ...

the work of the Resident Teacher ...

the One Who lives with us and in us.

That is why the letters have such a powerful effect on us:

Jesus, through the Spirit, is teaching us what He could not teach
 before dying, rising, and ascending to the Throne.

So, when we read the letter of Paul to the Romans,

we are reading the letter of the Paraclete through Paul to the Romans.

When we read the letter of Peter to those scattered throughout Asia Minor,

we are reading the letter of the Paraclete through Peter to disciples
 scattered throughout Asia Minor.

And that is why when we read the NT letters

we experience what we do.

They have been breathed by the very Breath of God!

The same Spirit Who hovered over the waters

and brought the world into being;

the same Spirit Who overshadowed the virgin Mary,

and brought the God-Man in to being;

that same Spirit

worked with broken human beings

like Paul and Peter and John,

and brought into being letters

that have changed the course of history,

I still remember the night I read through the whole of the letter to the Ephesians.

I had come home weary, somewhat despairing.

I felt pulled by the letter.

I sat on the couch ... and read the whole thing in one sitting.

By the time I finished I was on my knees,

tears of joy flowing down my face.

Freshly overcome by the massive portrayal of the love of God

for our sinful world.

“Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us with every blessing of the Spirit
in Christ” (1:3).

Over the past year or so I keep being drawn to the letter to the Hebrews.

Each time I spend time in it

I am stunned again by the implications of Jesus' death on the cross.

I find myself feeling washed of all guilt and shame.

I find myself being invigorated to keep going.

Right now I am being drawn to Paul's passionate letter to the Galatians.

“Who has bewitched you?

This is the only thing I want to find out from you:

did you receive the Spirit by works of law,

or by hearing with faith?

Are you so foolish?

Having begun by the Spirit,

are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (3:1-3).

Having begun the adventure of discipleship

by the Holy Spirit giving you life in Jesus,

are you now going to live by trusting yourself

to make you holy and whole?

“Walk by the Spirit ... “ says Paul (5:16).

Or, more to the point,

“Walk by the Spirit ...” says the Spirit!

“Walk by My power and wisdom ...”

says the Spirit of power and wisdom.

Oh what a Friend we have in the Paraclete!

One more work Jesus promises us.

4. John 16, verse 13.

“He will disclose what is to come.”

The Paraclete will open up the future to us!

Now, Jesus did come of that before teaching in the Upper Room.

As He sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem.

Teaching which we have in Matthew 24-25.

But there was more to disclose.

There was more to teach about what the future involves.

And He promises that

in the absence of His physical presence

the Paraclete would open up the more!

I agree with those who see this promise

primarily fulfilled in the Spirit giving the apostle John

the experience he had on the island of Patmos.

This promise is primarily fulfilled in the brilliantly creative work

we called “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

As we read the last book of the Bible

we are reading the “disclosing work” of the Paraclete.

Which is why it has had such a powerful effect on the human imagination.

It is not just the product of a human being

projecting his wish-dreams on the canvas of our minds and hearts.

It is the product of the Paraclete

working with and in John,

giving him the great vision,

and enabling him to write it out for us.

John explicitly says that the vision comes from the Spirit.

From the One who is and was and is to come.

From Jesus Christ the first-born of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth.

And from the “seven Spirits of God” (1:4).

John’s way of reminding us of the perfection of the Spirit,

the number seven being the number of completeness.

Yes, John is the one who picks up the pen,

and with it paints the picture of the coming future,

the picture of a new heaven and a new earth.

But as John paints

the Spirit of truth paints.

The book begins with Jesus saying seven times:

“... hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

And the book ends with the Spirit,

along with the churches,

crying out to Jesus, "Come."

The Spirit knows what the future holds.

A new city.

Where there is no longer any death!

And He wants it to come!

In His love for Jesus ...

and in His love for us ...

He longs for Jesus to come with His city.

"He will disclose what it to come."

Because if we know what is to come it changes the way we live right now.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way:

"For if the future is dominated by the coming again of Jesus,

there is little room left on the screen

for projecting our anxieties and fantasies."

[In the intro to 1 Thessalonians, The Message]

The Paraclete wants us to look out on the horizon of the future

and see the coming of the Only One

Who can put it all back together.

He also wants us to look back into the past

and see the Only One who

forgives our sin,

heals our hurts,

redeems our failures.

And He wants us to look around in the present

and we the Only One who

can give us life,

and make us more holy and healthy.

So, are we surprised that the Paraclete likes to draw us to the Lord's Supper?

It is here that He discloses Jesus to us.

This event is all about Jesus.

It is here that we see Jesus in the past,

lifted up on the cross for our salvation.

It is here that we see Jesus in the future,

coming to make all things new.

It is here that we see Jesus in the present,

once again giving Himself to us as Living Bread and Living Water.

What a Friend!

What a precious, precious Friend.

Filling the space in which we follow Jesus.

