

Sermon: Easter 6 (A)
Text: John 14:15-21
May 17, 2020

St. Peter's, Norfolk

What do you think of when you hear the ***“comforter”***? Maybe you think of a big old warm blanket to wrap up in on a cold winter's night. Or maybe you think of a comforter as someone who will try to make you feel better when you are going through a difficult time.

In our Gospel reading for this morning, Jesus promised his disciples a ***“Comforter”***- the Holy Spirit. It's a promise He made not only to His twelve chosen, but to all his disciples throughout time. All Christians are recipients of this ***“Comforter”*** that Jesus promised to those who love Him, obey Him, and serve Him.

But what exactly is this ***“Comforter”*** that we are to receive? Well, I think there are three things that we need to understand in order to appreciate and to avail ourselves of the comfort of the ***“Comforter”***- the Holy Spirit. And I'd like to talk about all three for the next few moments.

The first thing we need to understand is the **IDENTITY** of the Holy Spirit. The Greek words used to describe the Holy Spirit are ***“allon parakleton”***. These words have been translated into English as both ***“another Comforter”*** and ***“another Counselor”***. You might think of a counselor as someone who will provide a listening ear and offer advice. One modern version of the Bible translates ***“allon parakleton”*** as ***“another friend”***.

I believe all three of these images (comforter, counselor and friend) help us understand what Jesus intended when He talked about the Holy Spirit. The ***“comfort”*** of the Holy Spirit is that you have a real and abiding ***“friend”*** who loves you....a real friend who will not abandon you in the midst of difficulty. Like a ***“comforter”***, a friend will encourage you....he/she will stand beside you....to strengthen you when you need it the most. And like a ***“counselor”***, a friend will take the time to listen to you and hear your deepest concerns and be willing to offer advice and help you with difficult decisions.

Comforter, Counselor, and Friend- each of these help us to identify who the Holy Spirit is. The Greek word ***“allon”*** means literally- ***“another of the same kind”***. So Jesus told His disciples (and us) that when we receive the Holy Spirit into our

lives, we get “**another**” Comforter, Counselor, and Friend just like Himself because the Holy Spirit is like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is Jesus. That’s His identity.

The second thing we need to understand is the **INDWELLING** of the Holy Spirit. The world in which we live doesn’t put much stock in anything it can’t see or touch. The world wants to see something tangible. But the “**comfort**” of the Holy Spirit comes when we understand that there is power in the Holy Spirit....power which the world cannot see. Jesus told His disciples, “***The world cannot accept Him (the Spirit) because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for he lives with you and will be in you. [He will be IN you]***” (John 14:17). That’s the “**comfort**” of the Holy Spirit- when you know the Spirit of God is dwelling in you.

The Apostle Paul understood this well. To the Church he founded in Corinth he wrote, “***Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.***” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

And to the church in Ephesus he wrote, “***And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal- the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit [who is in you] guaranteeing your inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession- to the praise of His glory.***” (Ephesians 1:13-14)

The world will not put much stock in anything it can’t touch, feel, or see; but the Christian can find real comfort in knowing that he/she has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ and their willingness to be obedient to Him.

And then third, we must understand the **IMPACT** of the Holy Spirit. The “**comfort**” of the Holy Spirit comes when we understand the impact the Holy Spirit has in our lives. And He impacts us in at least three ways: First, as a teacher. Jesus told his disciples, “***But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.***” (John 14:26)

Second, He impacts us as a peacemaker. Jesus said, “***Peace I leave with you; my peace [the Spirit of peace] I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. [Be at peace!]***” John 14:27)

And third, the Holy Spirit impacts us because He empowers us to believe and trust and love. Jesus said, ***"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you. [Trust me to keep that promise] If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father..... I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe."*** (John 14:28-31)

And so, the ***"comfort"*** of the Holy Spirit comes when we allow the Spirit of our Lord to impact our lives as a Teacher, as a Peacemaker, and as someone who empowers us.

You know psychologists say that people need three things to make them happy. First of all they need to something to do....they need to have a purpose. Secondly, they need something or someone to love. And then finally, they need something to look forward to. I think all those things are true and could be supported by Scripture.

But I would add that to be truly happy....to experience the kind of happiness and satisfaction Jesus talked about, we need to be sure that we are doing the right things, and loving the right things, and looking forward to the right things.

As to doing the right things, having come to faith in Jesus, there is something to do- His work in the world. As Christian disciples, you and I (1) have the privilege of serving the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (2) We have the privilege of sharing our faith with others and telling our faith stories. (3) We have the privilege of nurturing our children and grandchildren in a Christian environment. (4) We have the privilege of using our God given talents to help others and to serve each other in Jesus' Name. (5) We have the privilege of building each other up and encouraging one another. And (6) we have the wonderful and incredible privilege of making an eternal and spiritual difference in the lives of people and the world. Those are good things....those are right things!

As for loving the right things, some people are in love with money and use it to try to buy happiness. Some people try to find true happiness in their jobs, or in their possessions. Some turn to drugs or alcohol. Some will turn to pornography or immorality to try to find happiness. But the reality they discover is that none of those things bring true and lasting happiness. In fact, many of them end up corrupting minds, destroying bodies and ruining lives.

Jesus said that the two greatest commandments involve love. We are to ***“.....love God with our whole heart, with all of our soul, with all of our strength, and with all our mind. And, we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.”*** An individual that is not in love with God, and not in love with his/her neighbor, and not in love with him/herself, can't know true happiness.

Not only does the happy person need something to do and someone to love, but they need something to look forward to. When we work.... we look forward to a paycheck, when we compete in a race.... we look forward to finishing and hopefully winning. Studies have shown that some POWs hopes were never dashed because they looked forward to someday being free again.

As Christians, we have something really exciting to look forward to. Jesus had told his disciples that He would be leaving them, and that upset them. But then he added, ***“In my Father’s house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you...and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am.”*** (John 14:2-3)

There is a place for each of us in God’s eternal home...specifically prepared for us by Jesus Himself. A place where there is no sickness or disease (no pandemics), a place where there is no pain, where there is no sin, and where there are no tears.

Yes, Jesus has gone away, but He has promised He’s coming back someday to receive us, and where He is- one day we will be for all eternity. My friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, it just doesn’t get any better than that!

Jesus once told His disciples, ***“I have come so that you might have life and have it in abundance.”*** I believe Jesus meant that we can have that abundant life both here and now and in the next world. And that abundant life is available to us through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His commandments. And all of this (all of it) is the work of the Holy Spirit as He impacts our lives.

This is all the work of the Holy Spirit- Comforter, Teacher, and the Source of power. We couldn’t begin to think these things, or do these things, or even believe these things on our own. But through the power of God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us, inspiring our spirits, we can do these things and more. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be the people God created us to be. Amen.