

June 16, 2019
Trinity Sunday
Father's Day

First Presbyterian Church
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THE PARACLETE IS MORE THAN FINE FEATHERED FRIEND

John 14:16-20; 25-26

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Prayer for illumination

Come Holy Spirit! Come with the power of a great wind, to clear out the cobwebs of our hearts, or come stealthily, as close as our own breathing, to whisper your truth into the silence of our lives. However you come, come with the power to change us that we might truly become the body of Christ in the world. Amen

"The Paraclete Is More Than Fine Feathered Friend"
John 14:16-20; 25-26

The reason for this sermon title, "The Paraclete Is Not A Fine Feathered Friend," is because I never met a pun with which I did want to not play, but it is rare that I find any that can be employed and preached. A parakeet, you know. It's a cute, and colorful little bird. But the word "paraclete" may not be quite so familiar. It is a rather esoteric word. It is a technical term that punctuates John's gospel, especially in the 14th chapter. We read only a portion of that chapter this morning, but the word "paraclete" appears there several times.

Given that John's Gospel was written in Greek, Paraclete is a Greek word that we are not quite sure how to translate into English. Some attempts include: "counselor," "advocate," "helper," and a few other variations on the same idea.

When the New Testament was translated into Latin, two words were employed to convey the meaning of Paraclete. "Cum" meaning with; and, "fortis," meaning "brave" or "with strength." These two Latin expressions compose the word "comfort." The paraclete is a comforter who walks alongside to strengthen, instill courage, and empower us to cope with the struggles we face. All these expressions are attempts to capture and name the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

John's gospel was the last one to be written, around 100 C.E. Which means that those to whom the gospel was addressed had been waiting seventy years for Jesus to return. It was evident that Jesus was not going to appear in the immediate time-frame as envisioned or anticipated. Equally apparent to the Christians was that they had to cope, day by day, with all the dangers and difficulties they found themselves having to endure.

They felt desolate. They felt orphaned. Clear in their conviction however, was that they had a commission, they were to keep the faith and continue forward. They re-claimed the promise Jesus gave to his disciples – the promise that he would not leave them desolate, that he would not leave them orphaned. The promise of a paraclete to walk with them, not to rescue them, but to guide them. Not to sequester them, but to strengthen them for service. They reclaimed the promise fulfilled at Pentecost.

It was on the day of Pentecost, a collection of timid, frightened, unfocused apostles were infused with faith, hope, zeal, and courage. They became seventy times the people of passion and persuasion that they were before. Through the outpouring of the holy spirit they did far more in Christ's name when He was absent, than they had ever done while He was present. All because the paraclete descended as promised.

The late Robert Drake, who was a University English professor and writer from Tennessee, wrote about growing up in Western Tennessee a generation ago. In one of his short stories, he told a story about Miss Caroline Walker, who was a music teacher. She had been doing it for as long as anybody could remember. She was something of a legend in her county in Tennessee.

She had two goals in teaching. One was to teach her girls to be ladies. So she taught them manners as much as she taught them music. She also taught them to play one piece perfectly for the June recital. She rehearsed them and drilled them all year long to play that one piece perfectly, including instructions on how to sit on the piano bench, to drape your skirt as you sit down, and how to announce the song by standing straight and holding your hands together at your waist.

The night of the recital came. It was held in the high school auditorium. Ten pupils of Miss Caroline's were there waiting for their turn. A young lady named Ann Louise was up next. She was terrified. She didn't know if she was going to throw up or faint (or both). She was convinced she would never make it. But it was her turn. She moved forward to the wings where Miss Caroline was waiting. Miss Caroline could see how nervous and anxious Ann

Louise was. Her body was stiff and rigid. Her hands were clammy. Miss Caroline put her hands on Ann Louise's shoulders, and bent down to whisper in her ear, "You have worked hard. You know this piece. You have nothing to fear. And remember, I am counting with you all the way."

With a little shove she pushed Ann Louise out onto the stage where, all of a sudden, she was facing this large audience of everybody's relatives, including her own. She announced her piece, then draped her skirt, and sat on the bench. She noticed that she was much calmer than she thought she would be. She noticed that Miss Caroline was still there in the wings. She remembered the last words that she said to her, "I am counting with you all the way." She didn't say, "I am counting on you." She said, "I am counting with you."

And Robert Drake wrote this. "She felt that they were held together by something beyond either of them alone. Teacher and disciple were as one. She realized that it was this that she had been preparing for all year long, this test. And the music, at her command, came cascading out of that baby grand piano into the darkened auditorium full of joy and full of life, right on cue." [i]

That's the power of the Paraclete, where teacher and disciple become one. All because of this incredibly, encouraging, comforting, empowering and uplifting Paraclete.

As poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it in his piece *God's Grandeur*, that

...the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. ("*God's Grandeur*") [ii]

Far more than a fine feathered friend, the paraclete is the animating presence of the living God for community of believers.

And therefore then, through the power and working of the Paraclete we partake of the life changing divinity and glorified humanity of the Lord in the promise packed future God has for us to live into where teacher and disciple become one.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, as we receive your Word for us, and as your Holy Spirit rests upon us. Help us to be steadfast in our hearing, in our speaking, in our believing, and in our living. Amen

[i] *For the Record: A Robert Drake Reader* (fiction), 2001

[ii] Gerard Manley Hopkins: *Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985)