

## Scripture

John 14: 15-21

If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

*(New International Version)*

Big Idea: Sometimes we are better off understanding that there is a wide array of potential meanings for a particular word from Greek. A good example of this is Paraclete and it's meaning in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

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In the Gospel of John, we get a strong unity in what we call the Trinity.

In the famous opening of the Gospel of John ... we hear John tell us that "In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God."

You get a clear idea that to John, Jesus – that is who the word is referring to in John 1 and God have some kind of pre-incarnational unity. They are one ...

<putting up hands and putting the fingers together> John sees God as father and God as son at a very high degree of unity ... there is a strong "oneness" to this identity.

The passage that Terry just read to you, you hear that Jesus strongly self identify with the God as the Holy Spirit ...

In the passage immediately before this one, Jesus tells the disciples he is "the truth".

Here you hear that Jesus offers to the disciples the “Spirit of Truth” and that because of this gift, we will not be left as orphans in the world. Jesus will be with us ... in the form of the Spirit ...

Just as John 1 gives us a clear idea of a strong oneness, a strong unity between God and Jesus <again, holding up hand and putting fingers together into a joined grip>, Jesus also sees a strong unity in the Gift of the Holy Spirit and himself.

We have been the past few weeks encouraging people to bring their bibles and read along in their own translations, and this passage is a good reason why we have been doing that ...

If you were reading in a King James Version ... you would have read the words “comforter” when Terry read the words “Counselor”.

If you were reading in a New Revised Standard Version ... you would have read the words “advocate” when Terry read the words “Counselor”.

Were there any other words when Terry read that “Counselor?” <wait for replies and see what others may have read/had>

Notice here how Jesus says “another” Paraclete? In 1 John 2: 1, Jesus identifies himself as a Paraclete – so Jesus ... within the idea of a strong amount of unity between himself, God and the Holy Spirit sees the HS as performing functions similar to those he performed himself. Another example of a strong degree of unity within a framework of differences still existing ...

But critical to this reflection is the Greek word that we use to come up with Paraclete.

The word in Greek is *parakletos* – which we sometimes display as Paraclete for exactly the reason I am going to unpack here ... it has a wide range of potential meanings ...

In 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek you would have heard Jesus as saying *parakletos* and having a wide range of potential words that could be used ...

The four I want to explore are:

- To Exhort or Encourage
  - To Comfort or Console
  - To Call upon FOR help
  - To Appeal

If you spoke or understood 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek, rather than 21<sup>st</sup> Century English ... you would have heard Jesus say that the Paraclete will be something that will exhort or encourage you.

We don't use exhort often anymore but to exhort is to *earnestly* urge ... you might even think ... Industrial Strength urging. It is a way of giving you a gentle, or not so gentle, prod when you start to feel a little down or have perhaps lost hope ....

Do you notice that Jesus implicitly acknowledges the need for us to be encouraged in our lives?

To borrow an idea from C. S. Lewis – God blesses with elements of the creation for which there will be an ultimate and clear purpose<sup>1</sup>.

If we need an encourager ... and it is again, more than gentle encouragement, it is encouragement offering with a great deal of earnestness ... passion if you will ... then that would suggest that there are indeed times in our life for which the role of encourager or passionate urging is necessary and needed ...

If you spoke or understood 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek, rather than 21<sup>st</sup> Century English ... you would have heard Jesus say that the Paraclete will be something that will comfort or console you.

Again, notice what Jesus is implicitly saying: I will give you a gift that will comfort you or console you ...

We so often want to live in a pain free world ... and sometimes we are surrounded by believers who seem to project a theology that says if a person is a person of faith, then, there will be no pain in their lives ...

I don't get that from the scripture and passages like this one here where God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit suggest that we are going to have times in our lives where we are empty ... or filled with pain ... and we need comfort and consoling.

God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to comfort and console us in times of pain and need.

If you spoke or understood 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek, rather than 21<sup>st</sup> Century English ... you would have heard Jesus say that the Paraclete will be something that you can call upon for help or assistance ...

Do you notice the difference in “help” us or “assist” us and not necessarily “do” for us?

God is omnipotent .. God is with that omni word thus capable of doing anything ... a God that can call the world into being with commands like “let there be” is a God of unlimited potential, but that doesn't mean God doesn't expect US to exercise some things on our own behalf ...

God gives us the gift of the HS in order to “help” or “assist” us ... not necessarily in all cases “do” it for us ...

We lift up our prayers so often to God and place on God our wish list ... and they are so often for God to “do this” or “do that”.

God – in the form of the Paraclete – often HELPS us to accomplish God's plan and purpose and project ... but sometimes it is for us to let that gentle – or not so gentle – urging of the HS be part of how we get helped to God's plan, purpose, or project ...

If you spoke or understood 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek, rather than 21<sup>st</sup> Century English ... you would have heard Jesus say that the Paraclete will be something that will be your advocate.

Can we all agree that we are often less than we would like to be?

Can we all agree that inside of our ourselves, we sometimes carry thoughts, desires, goals that are inconsistent with the Jesus project in the world?

God knows that and gives us a trained advocate who is experienced and skilled to appeal our case before the heavenly trial we will receive at some future time ...

We all have doubts about the quality of our lives ... is it truly good enough for salvation ...and we sometimes thing “no” to God's offer of “yes” when it comes to Grace ...

Well, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete if you will, is a trained advocate to stand before the heavenly version of the Supreme Court ...the HS knows how to persuade the heavenly equivalent of Justice Scalia or Ginsburg that you have been a good person in your trial on earth ... God helps us to realize the full measure of God's grace through the HS ...

God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit ... a gift that when we translate as comforter or advocate or counselor ... we lose so much of the nuance of the true meaning that John wishes to attribute to Jesus in this passage ... John hears and remembers Jesus as speaking to him and us in a

fashion with has multiple meanings to the word ... the meaning depending on what and where we are in our lives ...

At times where we need encouragement ... we can receive encouragement.

At times where we need assistance ... we can receive assistance.

At times where we comfort ... we can be consoled ...

At the times where we need an strong, well trained and experienced advocate ... we can receive it ...

The Paraclete is so much more than simply one word ... a word that so often domesticates God or makes God more like a pet or a companion ....

The Holy Spirit is the very presence of Jesus and God in our lives ... that which is in us is greater than that which is in the world ... and it blesses us and animates us and gives us a spark of the divine and gives us our very soul ...a presence which encourages when we need encouragement, assists when we need assistance, comforts when we need consolation, and advocates for when we need an advocate ...

And that is just the tip of the iceberg in what this omnipotent – unlimited potential – God can do ... .

Let us pray ....

This Sermon was delivered at Stratmoor Hills UMC in Colorado Springs on April 27, 2008. The copyright belongs to C. Dennis Shaw and dates from April 27, 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis says that God doesn't give us an urging or a longing for which there is no opportunity for us to experience the source of that longing or need.