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“A New Helper”

Psalm 67 Revelation 21:10, 22; 22-:5 John 14:23-29

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 14:23-29

Last week we focused on Jesus’ New Commandment. This week we are going to focus on the source of power to enable us to obey that New Commandment—a New Helper. Jesus was preparing his disciples for tough times. He knew he was about to leave them. Yet, they would not be alone, for he would be with them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit--a New Helper.

Last Sunday we saw God expanding Peter’s vision of who was to be included in the family of God by being sent to pray for a Roman Centurion and his family. As a result Peter realized that the family of God was open to including more than direct descendants of Abraham. (although the fact that King David’s Great Grandmother was not Jewish should have given him a clue).

This Sunday we see God expanding Paul’s vision of who God calls to leadership in the family of God. Paul’s vision in his dream was of a man from Macedonia. In order to have a synagogue you had to have 10 men gathered to start a synagogue. When Paul arrived he couldn’t find a synagogue so he went to the next logical place of meeting –the river. Who did he find there but a group of women. Paul’s vision of a Man from Macedonia turned out to be a Woman from Thyratira. (I wonder if at that point in Paul’s development if he would have gone if the dream was of a woman from Macedonia) Peter and Paul’s vision of God’s family expanded because Jesus fulfilled his promise of sending a New Helper.

Last Sunday we looked at Jesus’ New Command. This Sunday we read how we will be able to obey that new command because Jesus promised a New Helper.

A family was sitting in church when their youngest daughter tugged on her mother’s dress. Mom leaned to her side and the little girl whispered, "I know who the Father and the Son are, but what’s the Holy Spearmint?"

As long as Jesus was in human form he could only be in one place at one time. After his resurrection and ascension he would send the Holy Spirit who would not be limited by time or space. The Holy Spirit would be with them and in them wherever they would go.

We believe in the Holy Spirit. We baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The word Jesus used to define the Holy Spirit is Paracletos—para meaning alongside as in para-lell parking and.... cletos meaning helper, counselor, comforter-meaning one who comes to your side in times of need. (when it comes to parallel parking I do need a helper!)

The Holy Spirit is like a witness who takes the stand for a friend. The Holy Spirit is like an attorney who defends her client in court. The Holy Spirit is like a specialist who is called in to solve a problem.

Fred Anderson writes, "As wire links a power source with a light bulb, as a conduit links a source of water with dry land, as the radar wave links the transmitter to the receiver, as electronic emissions link a wireless network to a laptop computer, so the Spirit links us to God, bringing Christ's promised presence to dwell in us so that you and I continue to be Christ's presence in the world." (1)

In this passage Jesus describes two things that the Holy Spirit will do. The first is that the Spirit will "teach you all things." Did you ever have a favorite teacher?

One of my favorite teachers was my 6th grade teacher Mr. Oates. That was when 6th grade was still in elementary school and you had one teacher for every subject. For Mr. Oates, every subject was English. No matter what subject we were studying he would call out, "Diagram that sentence." As a result I made A's in English for the rest of my years as a student. That's where I developed my love of words and how to use them to "construct sentences that can be diagramed."

Great teachers awaken us to possibilities, enlighten us to truth, sensitize us to others, and give us tools to carry on. Wisdom is more than facts, figures, and formulas. Wisdom is discernment. Wisdom is truth, but the right truth at the right time for the right reason to the right person. The book of James says "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

The second task that the New Helper has is to be a Reminder of what we have been taught. This New Helper's job is to remind the faithful of the truth, jogging the memories of the followers of Jesus about all of his commandments so that they can keep them. (When I used to go for a run before my knee replacement I wouldn't take my laptop because I didn't want to jog my memory).

Jesus' disciples had been taught many things during the 3 years of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus promised to send them a New Helper who could not only continue to teach them God's truth, but remind them of what they had been taught so they could eventually write it down for us to learn!

In his book Lost In The Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book, Walker Percy describes a frequent device of soap operas, movies and novels. A principal character will develop amnesia. He or she is in a new place, with a new job, a new set of friends, perhaps a new lover. This plot device, says Percy, is endlessly fascinating since it feeds our fantasies about a risk-free forgetting of the old self and the embarking on a new identity.

Percy decides to push the question of amnesia to its highest power. "Imagine," he writes, "a soap opera in which a character awakens every morning with amnesia" Every day, the character is in a strange house with a strange man or woman. Everything is new and fresh -- the view from the window, the partner, the sense of the self. "(1)

Some of you may remember that this was put into one of Adam Sandler's films, "50 First Dates." where Drew Barrymore woke every morning with no memory of the day before. Percy's point, of course, is the lure of forgetfulness. One way to describe sin is willful forgetfulness. We choose amnesia; we decide as an act of the will not to remember that we are God's very own son, God's very own daughter.

The reason we need the Holy Spirit reminding us is that we are notoriously forgetful. We are amnesiacs who cannot keep our calling clearly in mind. We know that we are created to serve and love one another, but the pressure builds and the temptation to seek revenge is strong and we simply forget who we are and what we are purposed to do and be in life.

The doctrine of sin discloses that our loss of memory is not a momentary lapse. Having lost our memory, we now choose forgetfulness again and again, preferring the oblivion of amnesia to the sharp accountability of remembering the commandments.

God's mercy is, in part, the grace of memory. God's Spirit whispers in our ear, telling us what we cannot -- or do not want to remember, refreshing our memory about who we are and to whom we belong. When, in situations of challenge and stress, we remember the comfort and demand of the gospel, it is because the voice of the Holy Spirit whispering in our ear.

Memorial Day is a day to remember those who have fallen in the line of duty. It is an annual reminder of those who lost their lives in the service. Flags line the streets. Fireworks fill the skies. Prayers come from our hearts as we remember. Every time we celebrate the sacrament of communion we do it in remembrance of Jesus.

A minister reported her experience in taking communion to a woman in a nursing home who had Alzheimer's disease. When she arrived in the woman's room, she attempted to carry on a conversation with her. Even though she was a member of this minister's church and the minister had known her for years, meaningful communication was nearly impossible. The woman was confused and disoriented. She simply could not remember anything, including who she was or who the minister was.

When the minister set up the communion elements, the woman's confusion increased. Seeing the bread and the cup on her hospital table, she furrowed her

brow and tried to sweep them off with her hand, "What's this? What ...?"

But when the minister began the familiar communion liturgy, the woman grew calm. The Holy Spirit irrigated furrows in her memory deeper than any disease, more profound than any confusion. "On the night that our Lord was betrayed ...," the minister said, and the woman began to repeat the words silently with her lips. "This is my body, for you," the woman was now quietly speaking the words along with the minister, the Spirit whispering the lyrics in her ear. When the bread and the wine were offered, the woman eagerly, hungrily, took them in her hands -- the gifts of God for this daughter of God. The New Helper was helping her remember.

The assurance of loving, caring presence in our lives is so important throughout our lives. Children who grow up in unstable homes often struggle with feelings of rejection and low self-worth all their lives. We need the emotional support of other people throughout our life. We especially need it during life threatening situations. Those are the times we need the Peace that Jesus promised the Helper would bring.

I want to close with a story about Tom. Tom was scheduled for surgery. Tom could feel the anxiety rising. He knew his very life would be in the hands of the doctors. The day before surgery a nurse came into the room to talk with him about the operation. She took hold of his hand and asked him to hold it tight and feel its warmth. Tom had no objections to that. The hand was soft and smooth.

"Now," she said, during the surgery tomorrow you will be disconnected from your heart and you will be kept alive only by virtue of certain machines. And when your heart is finally restored and the operation is over and you are reconnected, you will eventually awaken in a special recovery room. But you will be immobile for as long as six hours. You may be unable to move, or speak, or to even open your eyes, but you will be perfectly conscious and you will hear and you will know everything that is going on around you. During those six hours, I will be at your side and I will hold your hand exactly as I am doing now. I will stay with you until you are fully recovered. Although you may feel absolutely helpless, when you feel my hand, you will know that I will not leave you."

The next day the surgery went exactly as the nurse had told him. When Tom woke, he could do nothing. Before he panicked, Tom felt the touch of the nurse's hand and he was at peace.

Jesus promised to send a Helper to come alongside his disciples as they faced the challenges before them. That same Helper is with us and can give us the power as we come alongside others like the nurse was with Tom; like the minister who took communion to the woman in the nursing home and to help us remember what we have been taught... and maybe even be able to teach others what we have learned....and maybe, just maybe even be able to answer little

girl's questions about the Holy Spearmintthrough the guidance and even the whispers of the Holy Spirit, our New Helper.

Let us pray. Gracious God who sent Jesus into the world to proclaim peace to the nations and release for the captives we pledge to be among those who share your word of love and gift of peace with those we meet. We pledge to carry your light into the city to illumine the dark places. Let the light shine on all who struggle in the darkness--the addicted, the homeless, the unemployed and the exploited. Help us to remove whatever stands in the way of their being able to walk with dignity.

Filled with the peace that Jesus gives, we bring the Spirit's counsel to those who are troubled. We pray for those who are attacked by real or imagined demons; keep us from compounding their disease with unwarranted judgment, and guide them to discern the cause of their affliction. We pray for those with learning disabilities; surround them by people skilled in stimulating appropriate patterns for growth. We pray for those who are in hospitals and care centers; bless the doctors, nurses, technicians, administrators, chaplains and volunteers who come alongside them in their time of need. Hear us as we lift to you by name those on our hearts this morning.

We pray for those whom society has forgotten or would rather not remember. Continue to goad us out of complacency through your Spirit so that we will not rest until the lost sheep are brought safely into the fold.

(1) The God in You by Fred R. Anderson

(2) Lost In The Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book, Walker Percy