

The Holy Spirit¹

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1. Introduction

The Gospel selection for today is part of Jesus' sermon to the disciples just before his crucifixion, one of my favorite sections of Scripture: John 13–17.

With verse 5, Jesus is again referring to his pending return to the Father, having referred to it several times over already.² We need to understand that he's not speaking of the three days in the tomb here. He is talking about his permanent departure, "going to him who sent me".

Part of what Jesus is trying to accomplish is to show the disciples that what is about to happen is no surprise to the Lord. *I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*³ Jesus wants them to be prepared for what is to come, so that they won't fall away under hardship. Note the nature of that preparation:

- 1. That they remember what Jesus has said to them. His words are to be their anchor.**
- 2. That they understand that God knows what's happening, that circumstances are well in hand, when they are in his hand, despite all appearances for us.**

2. Holy Spirit's Presence

In vs 6, Jesus observes their response to his news; "sorrow has filled your heart". They are under extreme duress. Jesus had already told them that going to Jerusalem was to be a very hazardous prospect. The pressures on them from the authorities is increasing. Judas just left on some mysterious duty. Of course sorrow has filled their hearts!

The only thing that has kept the flock from scattering is this good shepherd. Now he says "I am going away"! The disciples have bet everything on Jesus and he is leaving.

¹

² See 6:62, 7:33, 12:8.

³ 16.4.

Responding to their sorrow, Jesus says, “It is to your advantage that I go away.”⁴ We can imagine the disciples perhaps thinking: “And how do you figure that?”

In the flesh, Jesus’ influence is local. The disciples have no idea how widely their little band is going to expand across both the space of the continents and the span of time. Jesus does. The disciples are thinking about the next few days. Jesus is thinking about the next few centuries.

What Jesus cannot do in his body—tend to this little flock and all those who will come after—the Holy Spirit, the helper of verse 7, can do without the limitations of space or time. Looking beyond the resurrection, Jesus sees his ascension and Pentecost to follow. He sees the events in the book of the Acts. And he sees the last 2000 years of history. That is why he says *it is to your advantage that I go away*. Why? Because, Jesus continues, *if I go, I will send [the Comforter] to you*.

The gospel readings since Easter have been building us up toward a future view of the work of God in the world. They have been reflecting the build up for Pentecost that has been going on in the ministry of Jesus.

1. Jesus miraculously appears in the midst of his disciples. He prays for peace in their midst and then he breathes on them and says *receive the Holy Spirit*.⁵
2. Jesus talks about the sheep which are still lost, that he will bring in. There’s still work to be done and he will accomplish it!⁶
3. Last week’s gospel reading actually picks up with the verse following our reading for today. Jesus promises his disciples that when they see him again, they will have a joy that no one can take from them. His coming suffering, crucifixion, and burial are all momentary and even preparatory.⁷
4. This week the explanation is given as to how the joy will come. *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me*.⁸

Though we are not apostles, we are disciples. Their sorrow is often ours. Their need is always ours. We know ourselves to be very small pieces on a very large chess board of time and place. Since we can’t be in control—praise God!—it’s important to know that someone is.

- 1. We likewise have the promise of this Comforter. Note that title: Comforter. Helper. Accompanier. The one who reminds; who prays when we don’t know how; who consoles and empowers; who points us in the right direction of truth.**
- 2. We need this resurrection Presence of God’s Spirit of truth. Throughout the history of the church, it was not good theologians or pastors who have**

⁴ 16.7.

⁵ John 20.19 and following.

⁶ John 10.11 and following.

⁷ John 16.16 and following.

⁸ John 16.13–14.

preserved the faith. It was not good congregations. It was not a translation of the Bible. It was not a creed or a confession. It was the continuous ongoing work of the Holy Spirit among us to point us to Jesus and to keep us abiding in Jesus.

- 3. The test of the true work of the Spirit is whether we are appointed to Jesus. *When the Spirit of truth comes ... he will not speak on his own authority ... He will glorify me.***

The Son's absence = the Spirit's presence.

3. Holy Spirit Conduct

Jesus talks about the Spirit's presence, because Jesus has expectations regarding the disciples' conduct. Remember that Jesus started this section with a command.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.⁹

While the cat is away, we mice shall not play! Jesus is pointing out that His physical absence is not the same as his spiritual absence. And there's more.

- We are expected to do the works of Christ (14.12).
- We are expected to keep his commandments (14.15).
- We are expected to have faith (14.29).
- We are expected to bear fruit (15.5).
- We are expected to abide in Christ, steadfast in our faith (15.7).
- We are expected to undergo and withstand persecution (15.20).
- We are expected to bear witness to the truth (15.27).

In this way, Jesus' presence is to be continually perceived in the world, through his followers. *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another ... By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*¹⁰

And consider the opposite. If we do not bear much fruit, then God is not glorified, and it is proved that we are **not** his disciples. If we do not have love for one another, by this all people will know that we are **not** his disciples.

Is God glorified by us? Do we love one another? Are you his disciple? Come on!

- *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*

⁹ John 13.31-35.

¹⁰ John 13.35, 15.8.

- *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.*¹¹

Act like a Christian! Love one another. You're a new creature; it shouldn't be too hard! Except that it is.

4. Holy Spirit's Help

That's why Holy Spirit conduct needs Holy Spirit Help.

*He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*¹²

Let's understand this word "convict". In Christianese we tend to understand this word as having a strong feeling about something. "I felt convicted that I should talk to someone, or do something." Here the word has more of the sense of exposing the crime or error of another, and then persuading them to correct their path. It's not a feeling, but a change in our thoughts and deeds.

4.1 Of Sin

The Holy Spirit will convict all the world of sin. And primarily, as Jesus says here, the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning the sin of unbelief: *because they do not believe in me.*

"Oh great," we think, "just what I need, another voice telling me about all the things I've done wrong." My husband does that all the time. My wife enjoys pointing those things out. (*Etc.*)

But this is different. This is the Holy Spirit the Helper. He comes alongside and does in our hearts what all the arguments, sermons, self-help books, and counseling sessions could never do alone. He counters unbelief with belief! He responds positively to the plea of the father of the demon-possessed boy— "I believe; help my unbelief!"¹³

4.2 Of Righteousness

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and of righteousness. What does that mean? The text says that the Holy Spirit does this because Jesus will be going to the Father.

We are to be holy, as God is holy. It's no secret that we are pretty bad at that. In fact, the only comprehensible and reliable example of perfect righteousness that has ever been, is Jesus himself. We are to emulate the Son and have the mind of Christ.

How can we do that? Again, this is the Holy Spirit the Helper. He walks alongside us, reminding us of truth. He empowers us both to know and to do. There's a reason he's called the Holy Spirit—or the Spirit of Holiness.

¹¹ 2 Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10.

¹² John 16:8-11.

¹³ Mark 9:24.

4.3 Of Judgment

Finally, the Spirit convicts the world of judgment, *because the ruler of this world is judged*. The world has its false ideals, its own spin on truth, and a pretty high view of its own authority. There are only two kingdoms and only one will last. The ruler of the first kingdom is the one speaking here in John. The other ruler is already judged. Court is adjourned. Sentence is passed. The decision is made.

So for those who *loved darkness rather than light, whose deeds are evil*,¹⁴ there is a great need for the work of the Spirit to change the conscience, to influence the will, and to lead us toward Jesus.¹⁵

The national anthem of the upside-down kingdom is “I Did It My Way”. The national anthem of the right-side-up kingdom is “On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand”.

5. Conclusion

Perhaps the most important implication of these things is what some call the forensic value of the atonement. The Collect for the 4th Sunday after Easter prays that,

[we] may love the thing which you command and desire that which you promise; so that among the many and various changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found.

God gives commands to be obeyed and promises to be believed. If our hearts are indwelt by the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Holiness, the Helper and the Comforter, we will love his commandments and long for the fulfilling of his promises. Then true joy is to be found in that place.

¹⁴ John 3.19.

¹⁵ Thanks to Lindemann for his “inspiration” about how to handle these verses. Volume II of The Propers, the 4th Sunday after Easter, the sermon on the Gospel lesson.