

Another Helper

In the name of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, dear friends in Christ: Scripture readings from the Gospel of St. John never fail to convey sublime truths in the simplest of terms. John gives us the teachings of Jesus directly. He gives them to us precisely. And he gives us the words of our Lord with great power and depth. And because he does, it amazes me how often we can sit and listen to Jesus as John delivers him, and the words just sort of bounce off us. They don't sink in. Or we engage in a filtering process, absorbing the words we like and screening out those that are more difficult to take.

What do I mean? Well, let me ask you: How many of you love the Lord Jesus? Raise your hand. Don't be shy. If you love the Lord Jesus, let yourself be counted. Raise your hand.

Really? Do you really love him? Yeah? Well, in today's Gospel, Jesus says you're a liar. He says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." There's no misunderstanding that. His teaching is clear. If you love Jesus, you *will* keep his commands. What did he command? Oh, little things like love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and your neighbor as yourself – your neighbor being everyone else on the planet except for your enemies; but he commanded you to love them too. More than that, he commanded you to do good to them, to return their evil with kindness, and to pray for them. Are you doing that? Consistently, without fail? What else did Jesus command? How about: take up your cross and follow me? Or this: forgive as you have been forgiven. Or here's a good one: be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect. Anyone claiming to be perfect here? No? Then according to the Lord's own words, you do not love Jesus. (Oh, and you who have a copy of the sermon and are reading ahead aren't off the hook here. You don't love Jesus either. And you get minus points for cheating.)

No. No one here can claim to love Jesus because none of us keeps his commands. And so these words of Jesus recorded by John, which on the surface sound so uplifting and encouraging, in reality condemn us all. You do not love Jesus.

But friends, there is good news: Jesus loves you. That's why he came into this world, born the Child of Mary. That's why he lived for you a perfect life as a man. That's why he gave his life on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for your sin. And that's why he rose from the dead to announce his victory on your behalf. He does it all for you because he loves you. And it's a basic biblical principle that whenever God demands something of you, he must provide it. I mean, after all, what have you got (other than sin) that God didn't give you? Nothing. So, if you are to love Jesus, and today's text clearly indicates that's what he wants you to do, God himself must give you that love.

And that brings us to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, or, as he's called in today's text, "another Helper". That might not be the best translation because it makes it sound like he's an assistant or something, one who *helps* get a job done – we do our part and he does his and together we reach the goal. That's not it at all. In fact, by calling him *another* helper, we have to ask who the first one is. And that would be Jesus. He helped you by saving you. How much of the work did you do there? None, right? And so it is with the Spirit's help. He does all the work there too – the work we call *sanctification*.

The word which our text translates “Helper” is in Greek “Paraklaeton”, which is sometimes rendered in English “Paraclete”. You’ve probably heard that term. It literally means “one who calls from alongside”. It was a word used to describe a legal advocate, guide, or life coach; someone who came along with you to render constant expert advice, instruction, and encouragement. Other times you’ll see the word translated “Counselor” or “Comforter”. The latter term is especially good, but it’s often misunderstood. When we think “comforter” we think of a big poofy bedspread. If we called someone a comforter we’d think about someone who maybe sat with us and said soothing things at a time of sorrow or loss; but that’s not the idea. When applied to the Holy Spirit, the word Comforter must be understood from its original Latin roots. It’s a combination of two words: *com*, which means with; and *fortus*, which means power or strength. So calling the Holy Spirit the Comforter says that he’s the one who conveys power to us to do what we could not do otherwise. And if you’re wondering why we have so many terms like Helper, Paraclete, Counselor, and Comforter to describe the Holy Spirit, the answer is because no single English word captures the whole concept. Our text uses “Helper”, so we’ll stick with that; but we’ll understand that it means a lot more.

Okay, so what does our other Helper do? Jesus explains that he is the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees nor knows him. Why not? It’s because the world is in rebellion against God’s Truth. It will be to the very end. This world seeks after glory. It seeks achievement and fame and riches. It seeks its pleasure at the expense of others. It seeks to rule rather than to be ruled. It seeks to justify and to save itself. And to the extent that we are worldly, we want the same. This is the way we think.

But the Spirit comes along side of us to convict us of the Truth – God’s Truth. First the Spirit, by the Word of God, convicts us of our sin. He shows us the futility of seeking after worldly glory which is destined to fade away. He convinces us that our achievements – even the ones of which we are most proud – are presumptuous sins in the sight of God. He reveals that our pleasure-seeking and pursuit of power over others is the opposite of godly love, which seeks to serve rather than to be served. And he proves that we cannot justify or save ourselves from our sinful condition. In short, the Spirit uses God’s Word of Truth to show us that we stand condemned in the court of divine justice and are rightly sentenced to eternal hellfire. He instills in us the fear of God and his judgments.

He does this not simply to terrify us. There’s no cruelty in it. No, he does it so that he can convict us in our hearts of another Truth: the way of salvation God has achieved for us in his Son, which depends not one iota on what we do, but rather on what Jesus has done for us by his passion, death, and resurrection. The Spirit gives us the power to receive, believe, and trust in the Gospel. He convinces us that for Christ’s sake, God has forgiven our sins. And thus the Spirit instills in us the joy of salvation and the hope of everlasting life. He enables us to stand firm on the promise of Jesus, “Because I live, you will live also.”

Our other Helper does more. He also enables us to see and experience Christ our Lord in the present. Jesus says, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.” In the immediate context, Jesus is speaking to his disciples of his upcoming death and resurrection. After he was crucified, the world saw him no more. When he was raised from the dead he revealed himself only to a comparative few – though we know that there were over 500 of them. He also showed himself to St. Paul. Last week we heard how he revealed himself to St. Stephen as he was being martyred. These people were all eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

But the promise of Jesus not to leave his disciples as orphans and to come to them doesn't stop there. We are not orphans either. And Jesus does come to us. It's for this very reason that Jesus instituted the ministry of Word and Sacrament. It's all about his coming to us. Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel, "Baptize, teach all that I've commanded, *and I am with you.*" Where is Jesus? With us. How does he come? In the Baptizing and teaching. That's how we see Jesus. That's how we hear him. We also see and hear him in the Lord's Supper – and through the Supper Christ comes to dwell in us as we receive his very body and blood. The work of the Spirit, our other Helper, in this regard is to convince us of these truths. He enables us to see in a spiritual sense what the world does not: that through the ministry of Word and Sacrament Christ Jesus our Lord is here with us giving us the benefits of his cross.

These, by the way, are commands of Jesus that we can and do keep: Baptize. Teach. Do this in remembrance of me. And when we keep these commands, Jesus does indeed send to us his Holy Spirit – our other Helper – who from within us empowers us to believe the Gospel, to see Christ as he comes to us; and oh, and one more thing: the Spirit enables us to begin, at least, to love the Lord Jesus and one another.

And that brings us back to where we started: to the question, do you love the Lord Jesus? Well, do you?

If you're not so sure this time, let me ask you this: Have you been Baptized into Christ? Are you being taught his Word? Are you confessing your sins and receiving Christ's word of forgiveness. Are you receiving the Lord's body and blood? If the answer to these questions is yes, then you are keeping Christ's commands. And by his Holy Spirit he is creating and sustaining in you a new person, a person who is sinless before God by grace through faith, a person who truly does love the Lord Jesus. That's what our other Helper does as he sanctifies and keeps us with Jesus Christ in the one, true, and saving faith. Therefore to him with the Father and the Son be our praise and honor now and forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!