

Sermon: **Holy Spirit, helper and truth**

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**Bible Reading:** John 14:15-26

For my sermon this morning I'd like to explore a couple of big ideas about the Holy Spirit packed in tightly into John 14.

The Common Lectionary is our set pattern of readings, that we share with many other churches around the world. It's a helpful framework, but one of main problems with it is that you don't get much John. The Lectionary is a 3-year rotation, you read through Matthew, Mark and Luke then back to Matthew again. So when we do get bits from John it always feels like a bit of a treat.

And today, and next week, we are in John. Then that's it. Sorry, no more John till next Easter.

So, while we have the honour of reading from John's gospel, let's dwell in John's theology for a moment. Chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17 are basically one long monologue by Jesus, known by scholars as the Upper Room Discourse, because it's all packed in to the story of Maundy Thursday, inbetween the last supper meal and going to the garden in the dark where Judas betrays him to the guards.

In terms of the story these 4 chapters are like the tardis. If you have ever watched any Doctor Who you will know that the doctor travels through space and time in something which looks on the outside exactly like an old fashioned phone box. Dark blue, with a little light on top. Barely big enough for one person. But when you step inside it is enormous. The Tardis is bigger on the inside than the outside.

John's gospel is definitely like that.

Every word, indeed, is bigger on the inside than the outside, and especially all the words packed into the Upper Room discourse of chapters 14 to 17.

This morning we're in chapter 14, and this spins around, in the tardis zooming through a time warp kind of a way, around a huge central idea, that God and Jesus are one and that we get to be part of that one-ness through the Spirit.

*Believe in the Father, believe also in me*

*I am in the Father and the Father is in me*

*I will do what you ask so that the Father will be glorified in the Son*

*Love me, keep my word, and the Father will love you and we will make our home in you*

It makes my head spin.

It's a dance, in and with and together and apart

And the Spirit is the link. The Spirit is what holds everything together. If John 14 is a dance, the Spirit is the music that we're dancing to.

The Spirit is the framework, the sinews, the guy ropes, the flow of sap

John 14 uses two particular words for the Spirit, two names to give us something to hang on to.

First, the Greek word 'paraclete'. Our Good News pew Bibles translates this as 'Helper'.

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever.*

A Helper, as in, an assistant, a PA, someone who gets things done ... someone like Cecile coming into the office and printing our bulletins with me.

I've been loaned an electric bike by a friend. I can ride it as a normal bike, but then instead of toiling my way painfully up the hill, or giving up and getting off and walking, I can push the button and the electric motor kicks in, and wow, I'm away laughing. The power of the

ebike works with my own legs turning the pedals around, but suddenly I can bike up the hill! It's amazing.

The Holy Spirit as Helper is like this.

A more common translation of *paraclete* is Advocate.

The Greek word *paraclete* is two words joined together – *Para* meaning 'with', or alongside, and '*Kale*' meaning to call. It is just the same word – *kale* is call, you know, to cry out. So a *paraclete* is someone who is standing next to you and calling out.

Specifically this fits in the context of a law court. Your advocate is your defence attorney, standing next to you, calling out to the judge & jury in your defence.

When has someone stuck up for you, spoken out in your defence?

And I'm sure you will have had times when you chose to stand with someone else, maybe a friend or a colleague, to vouch for them, to be there for them when they needed you.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, with us, advocating for us, on our side.

There is one more important word that can be used to translate *Paraclete*, and that is Comforter. Your bible at home might use this word here. It fits the meaning of *para*-with and *call*, but it's more intimate. Here we're not in a court room but at home. The Comforter is with, close, but the calling is direct to you, not to others about you.

This fits what Jesus goes on to say about the Holy Spirit speaking truth into our hearts.

I don't know about you but when I am upset I don't necessarily need someone else to say much, it's just being with me what matters. It's another's loving presence that is the comfort.

It is the 'with'ness of the Spirit that John emphasises in chapter 14.

verse 17:

*You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you*

This is the point at which John's grand high theology of the trinity comes home to us. God the Father and God the Son don't waft off into outer space in their own dance of time-less adoration. They could do, but it seems that God, for some reason, wants to share it with us. So God opens the door for us, freely invites us to share in the wonder of it all. That's the gift of the Spirit, that God is with us and we are with God and God is in you and you are in God. *Paraclete*.

Verse 17 has another name: the Spirit of truth. In Greek, the *Pneuma* of *Aletheia*.

*Alatheia* meaning literally 'not hidden'. The Spirit of Truth reveals what was hidden, opens up what was locked away.

It fascinates me in the Bible that truth is not a static thing, it's not so obviously right/wrong yes/no multichoice tick box answers to life's big questions. Truth is a process. Truth is something to seek, to go after. Truth is a process of revelation, of uncovering what was there, of gradually knowing what was previously unknowable, of grasping what had been out of reach.

This is what the Spirit of Jesus does. The Spirit of Truth, searches and finds, looks deep within and looks out wider than our vision into the far reaches of the galaxies out beyond time itself.

And especially, if there's one thing in particular that the Spirit of truth is most interested in, is the truth about Jesus.

At the end of our reading today is this verse, 25:

*The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.*

The Spirit as paraclete is with us, communicating to us, and teaching us – what? EVERYTHING!!

in particular – what?

What Jesus said. The Spirit is our memory of Jesus, our relationship with him.

So, I could go on but that's enough. Heaps. More than enough. John 14 is like that, once you start delving in it's hard to stop.

I do encourage you to open your bibles at home at John chapters 14 to 17. Delve in, just a little bit at a time or it will do your head in. It's bigger on the inside than on the outside. And it will make you bigger on the inside than on the outside.

I encourage you to reflect on what it's like to need an advocate or a comforter. When you pause to pray, ask God to be with you in a fresh way, to speak to you, close by.

I encourage you also to notice the times when you step up as advocate and comforter for another person. When you do, you are sharing in the work of the Holy Spirit. Even this coming week, there will be times when you just know that you need to be with someone, in person or maybe on the phone or through a letter. I encourage your calling to be friend, paraclete, to someone else.

And, lastly, I encourage you in your search for truth. The Spirit is there with you, like a torch in your hand as you look. Trust what you see, trust what you know to be true, and trust that you have a friend within you and beside you as you go.

Amplified Bible:

*John 14: 15-17*

*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengtheners, Standby), to be with you forever— <sup>17</sup>the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive [and take to its heart] because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He (the Holy Spirit) remains with you continually and will be in you.*