

## Scripture for Sunday May 26 2019

### John 14:15-29 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

<sup>22</sup> Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” <sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup> Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup> “All this I have spoken while still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. <sup>28</sup> “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

### Sermon: The Helper is Coming

Imagine, if you can – and I realise this means going to a dark place – what you might say to your family and friends if you knew you were soon about to die! You might express gratitude for the shared love you have experienced and – possibly - some regrets. You might vent some anger at the unfairness of life. You might give some instructions concerning your funeral or will, in other words, you might want your affairs to be in order and for there to be no family fights! In light of what you and I might do in such circumstances, consider the words of Jesus in today’s reading from John 14 as he faces his own death. They are shockingly different from the kinds of things we might say. For a start, he says, “I’ll be back!”<sup>1</sup> He also says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”<sup>2</sup> and “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”<sup>3</sup> These are powerful statements and claims – and there are others. What are we to make of them? John is a complex gospel – so please bear with me this morning!

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:3,18,19,28. (“I’ll be back” is a catchphrase associated with Arnold Schwarzenegger from *The Terminator* movies!)

<sup>2</sup> John 14:15. See also 14:23-24; 15:9-15. Note: “words” and “commands” are synonymous in this context.

<sup>3</sup> John 14:27.

John chapters 14-17 are known as “The Farewell Discourse of Jesus” to his disciples. This speech [and prayer] takes place at the time of the Passover meal, just after Jesus had washed his disciples’ feet.<sup>4</sup> He is aware that the disciples are anxious and upset; Christ’s imminent death is not what they had expected to happen when Jesus came to Jerusalem. Jesus therefore tries to calm their fears throughout this long speech.<sup>5</sup> For example, he says: “I will not leave you orphaned,”<sup>6</sup> which is a common metaphor for disciples with no master. He also says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”<sup>7</sup> These are beautiful and profound chapters in John, and I encourage you to re-read them.<sup>8</sup> Jesus also states that he will ask God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to them<sup>9</sup> and, with the season of Pentecost coming, this seemed one aspect of The Farewell Discourse that we should consider this morning.

John introduces a unique word for the Holy Spirit in this speech; in Greek its “*paraclete*” and this has been translated in various ways.<sup>10</sup> Its root comes from a legal defense counsel and so it is often translated as an “Advocate” who stands by your side. It has also been translated as “Comforter”; but this is too *narrow* a translation today as we think of that as a “Consoler.” “Helper” or “Enabler” are perhaps the best modern translations, as long as we associate these words with having a strengthening Encourager alongside you. Jesus says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another* Helper, to be with you *forever*.”<sup>11</sup> Notice the word “another”; Jesus is therefore *also* a *paraclete* or Helper.<sup>12</sup> However, since Jesus is leaving, he says he will not leave them alone, but will send the Spirit who will have the same *function* as he himself up until now.<sup>13</sup> One thing the Spirit will help us with is keeping Christ’s commandments, in other words, the *ethical* imperative of the gospel. Jesus is asking his followers to embrace the *love* that he lived among them as the goal for their own lives.<sup>14</sup> The love Jesus is talking about is *not* an abstract philosophical concept, nor sentimental, but a lived reality revealed in the relationships and actions that Jesus himself modelled. We are to feed the hungry, touch the lives of those society discards, heal the sick, etc.; that love is demonstrated when we embody Christ’s life in service and compassion.<sup>15</sup> That is what “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”<sup>16</sup> means. Jesus claims that God’s love is not only true, but is also the source *and* goal of life – life in *all* its fullness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John 13:1-17.

<sup>5</sup> See John 14: 1,18,25,27,29.

<sup>6</sup> John 14:18. Or “I will not abandon you.”

<sup>7</sup> John 14:27b.

<sup>8</sup> This is a privileged conversation between Jesus and his disciples; it is not going to be easily understood by those who do not want to follow Jesus. Note this is likely a compilation carefully edited together.

<sup>9</sup> John 14:16,26.

<sup>10</sup> This use of *paraclete* is unique to the New Testament, though there are a few references in the Old Testament.

<sup>11</sup> John 14:16. It is because Jesus will depart that the Holy Spirit (*paraclete*) will come.

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 2:1 makes his explicit. See also Rom 8: 26, 34 where both Jesus and the Spirit act as *Intercessors* or *Mediators*.

<sup>13</sup> The *verb* form of *paraclete* is therefore important.

<sup>14</sup> See John 13:34-35.

<sup>15</sup> This was demonstrated when Jesus washed the disciple’s feet (John 13:1-20).

<sup>16</sup> John 14:15,23; 13:34-35. “Obedience is the test of love and love is in the context of obedience” – Newbigin (cf. marriage).

<sup>17</sup> John 10:10. Due to John’s emphasis on love, his gospel is called the “gospel of love” (e.g., John 3:16).

Jesus knows that it will be difficult for the disciples to follow in his footsteps once he has departed because the “world” is subtly and systemically opposed to the message of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> If the ‘powers-that-be’ are working to put Jesus to death, then his followers can also expect opposition – and we see that in the book of Acts and throughout Church History. Jesus also says that the *peace* he gives them is unlike that of the world.<sup>19</sup> In those days, the gospel (or “good news”) of the peace of Rome (*pax Romana*) was proclaimed throughout the Empire, and it was brutally enforced by power and dominance. In contrast, the peace Jesus gives is *not* the absence of war, nor escapism, but the blessing of God that results from completeness. This *shalom* is the *living presence* of God, born of *love* - and love is *not* coercive.<sup>20</sup> That clash of worldviews is later embodied in the conversation between Pontius Pilate and Jesus.<sup>21</sup> And Pilate concludes that Jesus was no political threat to Rome.<sup>22</sup> Choosing the way of love over power *does* require courage and this way of living is difficult in any age. The Spirit of Jesus is not recognised by the “world,” to use John’s language, “because it neither sees him nor knows him.”<sup>23</sup> In modern terminology we might say the world is atheistic or agnostic - and therefore the world cannot recognise the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth.<sup>24</sup> If the world will not acknowledge Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life<sup>25</sup> – there should be no surprise that the world cannot receive the *paraclete*, the Spirit of truth.

Jesus then says that although the world does not see or know the Spirit, his followers know him “for he *lives or abides* with us, and will be *in or among us forever*.”<sup>26</sup> The Spirit is, then, the continuing presence of Jesus in the world. First note that Spirit here is not so much about being *in* individuals but present *amongst* a faithful community. The “you” in this passage is ‘you-plural’ *not* ‘you-singular.’ This can seem a bit confusing at first because we - as individuals - are baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> And a feature of our baptism is a *rebirth* by the Holy Spirit,<sup>28</sup> a fresh start in life and a new ethical orientation in God’s kingdom based on the power of the resurrection. But baptism is also a sign of welcome into God’s new *community*<sup>29</sup> and this ties in with the Holy Spirit as God’s gift to the *Church*. While, of course, this means the world-wide Church, nevertheless, the Helper is also present in a local community or congregation and is *most evident* when we *collectively* live the Jesus-way, in other words, living out his commandment to love God and neighbour<sup>30</sup> – or to “love one another as Jesus loved you,” as John’s gospel puts it.<sup>31</sup> John suggests that the empowering presence of the Spirit within

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<sup>18</sup> See John 15:18-27; 1:10. John’s use of “the world” is uncompromising and blunt.

<sup>19</sup> John 14:27. See also John 16:33, 20:19-21.

<sup>20</sup> Peace is bound up in all that makes for right relationships – love, forgiveness, reconciliation and thanksgiving. Such ‘righteousness’ is a profound gift. Such peace overcomes fear and anxiety (John 14:27b).

<sup>21</sup> John 18:28-19:16. This also subtle “powerplay” that, according to John, shows that it is Jesus who had the upper hand.

<sup>22</sup> John 18:38; 19:6b.

<sup>23</sup> John 14:17,19.

<sup>24</sup> See John 14:17,6. The “Spirit of truth” is another term unique to John.

<sup>25</sup> John 14:6-7. See also John 1:11-12.

<sup>26</sup> John 14:16-17.

<sup>27</sup> See Matt 28:18-20. See also <https://standrews-amherstburg.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/On-Baptism.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> John 3:5; Acts 2:38.

<sup>29</sup> For Jews, the *sign* of their mutual covenant with God is circumcision. But in the New Testament, that sign was replaced by baptism (see Gal 3:26-29; Eph 4:4-6; Col 2:11 – 13).

<sup>30</sup> Mark 12:28-31; Matt 22:36-40.

<sup>31</sup> John 13:34; 14:23-14.

a local church will be effective *to the extent* that we collectively and actively embody this love in faithful service to others.<sup>32</sup> That's a sobering thought.<sup>33</sup> The Helper will be alongside us forever *as we live out* the love of Jesus; the Holy Spirit – the *paraclete* – is very practical and we learn as we do!<sup>34</sup> This is, therefore, an important principle for the health and wellbeing of any church community, and this is demonstrated in the early church in Acts.<sup>35</sup>

Moving on, there is a certain level of mystery when Jesus then says, “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.”<sup>36</sup> Is Jesus referring to the post-resurrection appearances or to the final great ‘Day of the Lord’ at the end of time when Christ returns? It's not clear, though I am inclined to think it refers to the resurrection.<sup>37</sup> While Luke has the Holy Spirit coming in power at Pentecost,<sup>38</sup> John presents a similar moment at the end of his gospel in a post-resurrection appearance behind locked doors when Jesus comes among them and says, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”<sup>39</sup> This, it seems to me, is the fulfillment of what Jesus said in his Farewell Discourse – although this is, of course, just the first step of life in the Spirit.

So, the Holy Spirit is our Helper; he will encourage us and empower us to live the Jesus way, the way of love and forgiveness. That is, in short, living an ethical life according to *God's* standards. This is a life that leads to peace and fulfillment, for in doing so we learn what it means to become truly human. The Helper lives among us as a *community* of faithful followers of Jesus, and this typically begins with baptism today.<sup>40</sup> The *paraclete* has other practical roles too; Jesus says: “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will *teach you all things* and will *remind you of everything* I have said to you.”<sup>41</sup> The Spirit is therefore a teacher and one who keeps prompting us of the message and mission of Jesus the Messiah. The Holy Spirit is *not* simply the equivalent our conscience,<sup>42</sup> although a good conscience is – of course - a moral compass. Nevertheless, our conscience can be shaped or influenced by the Spirit in this role of teacher and reminder of the things of Jesus. One of the difficulties for us today is that John's language of “remind” sounds like we are literally hearing the voice of the God. Most people get suspicious and very concerned when people make claims of “hearing voices,” especially the authoritative voice of God, and think psychiatric care is needed! Again, this presence of the Spirit within us can be seen as too individualistic, rather than a communal presence. And this also

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<sup>32</sup> John 14:23-24; 15-16. It also suggests the opposite is true.

<sup>33</sup> This thought is not one that should lead to guilt or discouragement, but stimulate and encourage action!

<sup>34</sup> The Spirit of truth will also lead us into truth (John 14:26; 16:12-15). See also John 15:26-27.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37.

<sup>36</sup> John 14:19-20.

<sup>37</sup> It could be a double meaning; John has such things – see being “born again” in John 3!

<sup>38</sup> See Acts 2.

<sup>39</sup> John 20:21-22.

<sup>40</sup> But not exclusively; we see this with Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11-18. This is also experientially true today.

<sup>41</sup> John 14:26. See also 15:26-27. The Spirit, then, should not be confused with generalised ‘spirituality.’

<sup>42</sup> A conscience did not first appear at Pentecost, nor is it a result of baptism! A conscience can be shaped by parents, environment, social norms, and personal circumstances, even ourselves – and can be ignored. As such a conscience is a relative and *not* an absolute moral guide.

speaks to the need of wise discernment to ascertain the reliability of what thoughts and insights we might want to attribute to the Spirit. Moreover, the ongoing work of the Spirit reminds us of the message and mission of Jesus so that we can address what *specifically* is appropriate for a church community *today*, especially when there are multiple good options. It is also worth remembering that although Jesus is addressing his disciples privately, John is writing to a Christian community at the end of first century – to a generation of people who never knew Jesus while on Earth. This message concerning the Helper was for them, just as it is for us today.<sup>43</sup> And, unlike Jesus, the Spirit is not limited to a geographical location or a particular period of time. Moreover, because of the presence of the *paraclete* and all that he does in the life of the church, John does *not* see those who never knew Jesus in the flesh as being fundamentally disadvantaged or lacking.

There is another important thing to notice in our reading today, that is the relationship between Jesus, God the Father, the Spirit, and ourselves. Jesus says, “I am *in* my Father, and you are *in* me, and I am *in* you. . . The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. . . Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and *we* will come to them and make our home with them.”<sup>44</sup> The relational intimacy between Jesus and the Father, together with the Helper, is stunning. We have to decide whether this bold, powerful statement is true or crazy-talk! However, that relational intimacy was validated in the resurrection and such a passage from John’s gospel provided the seeds for the later doctrine of the Trinity. It was a good job such words were said privately to his closest followers else they would have provided grounds for blasphemy! Notice too how Jesus and the Father invites *us* into this relationship and will make their *home* with us. Some have poetically described this dynamic relationship as the divine dance, one which Jesus clearly invites us to join in. In trying to imagine this dance, rather than see it as an *individual* invitation to join the divine dance and live out the God’s mission in the world, see it as a *communal* invitation for us *all* to dance to God’s tune. This means it is more like line dancing or the social country dances of previous centuries, rather than dancing in pairs!

Pentecost, when the world-wide Church celebrates the coming of the Spirit in power, is just a couple of weeks way; it is also the Anniversary Service of St Andrew’s. As Jesus prepares his disciples for his own death, he tells them not to be afraid because the Helper is coming and will be with us forever. Do we recognise the Helper among us and within us? Do we seek his assistance or do we struggle on our own? Are we dancing in step with the Trinity? Do we want to be life-long learners being taught by the Spirit? These are all things to reflect upon over the next couple of weeks and to appreciate again – and to seek out - the divine gift of the *paraclete*, the powerful, encouraging, Enabler in our presence, both in the church and in our lives. Amen. Let us pray.

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<sup>43</sup> Also note that a Theology of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) is based not just on John’s understanding of the Spirit, but also that of Luke, Paul, and other biblical books, together with historical and theological reflection.

<sup>44</sup> John 14:20-21,23.