

A Gift from God
John 14
Dr. Alan H. Landes
Crestview Presbyterian Church
May 23, 2010 Pentecost

(read John 14:1-7)

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” These were words Jesus spoke to his disciples shortly before his death, and the first part of his 3-chapter farewell message. They’d spent three incredible years together listening to Jesus’ teachings, taken part in miracles beyond understanding, and just had their feet washed by the one they knew as Rabbi. They had given their lives over to him, they’d become a target to the scribes and Pharisees who challenged them, and they believed in him. After all, as Jesus told Thomas: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me.” In fact, “... if you know me, you know my Father as well.”

There are many of us who have given ourselves over to Jesus. We believe what we’ve been told, we accept the grace given to us by God through him, and call ourselves Christian believers. We’ve joined the church, try to live as we’ve been taught, and at our best, we’re disciples of Christ. Yet, still... things happen to us. A beloved spouse dies, leaving a pervasive emptiness. Children turn away from a parent’s love. The stock market plummets more than 300 points in a day, and our retirement funds once again start to look puny. Our personal energy begins to diminish, we have a hard time catching our breath, and the doctor tells us its leukemia. No matter how hard we believe- things still happen. Back then, Jesus was arrested and put to death... things happen, and what about God then?

Last week, Rodney told me about a mentor of his- one of the few remaining that he could turn to with a musical question, or the uncertainty that sometimes accompanies directing a choir... someone who knew him from the inside out. Trilby Lynch was her name, and he went to play at her funeral last Monday. Rodney- you were telling me about her... and about the song that came to mind... can you share a bit about that?

Rodney

Something brought that song to mind; Rodney was not left alone in his sense of loss, and neither are we. As the Thomas and Philip and the other disciples began to wrestle with Jesus' impending departure, this is what he told them:

(read John 14:15-18)

In other words, hang in there and do as I have taught you... remember the new commandment I gave you back a chapter earlier- "Love one another, and by this- all will know you are my disciples." As I leave however, God will send you another One... the one called the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit. Don't stop believing in me, because the Holy Spirit will give you what you need to deal with whatever comes your way. Take a look at this...

(show video)

This is something more than the shock of electric energy; it's beyond Yoda's "just trust the Force, Luke"; it's something more real than Casper the friendly cartoon ghost. This is a Personal Presence who will help you know the gospel truth when you see it; it will inform your conscience and help you choose right from wrong- should you choose to listen to it; it will fill your heart with joy at things as holy as a child's bawling cry, a whispered "I love you" from someone next to you, or when you pull back the curtain

after a restless night on a brilliant sunrise full of glorious hope. Only those who have faith in Jesus as the Way, the Truth and Life can truly sense it, and there is nothing that can separate us from it- unless we choose to. The Holy Spirit is a companion who will journey with each of us along life's way... because God will not leave any of us as "orphans."

A few weeks ago, those in the Tuesday night Bible study learned about the Greek word, *paraclete*. The word means many things, and a literal translation would mean "to call one alongside; sometimes, the Holy Spirit is called "The Paraclete." A friend of many of us, Gary Sweeten, likes to talk about another use of the word "paraclete." Some use the word to describe a military technique that links two soldiers next to one another... back to back, if need be. If one turns, the other turns; that way, the "paraclete" always has our back, and we are never left alone. This is what Jesus promised, and this is who arrived on Pentecost Day... fifty days after Easter, and shortly after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Speaking from this side of Pentecost, Jesus' words back in John 14 mean even more to us:

(read John 14:25-26)

Come what may- arrest, crucifixion, economic calamity, medical distress, relational issues, grief, pain, sorrow... never are we left alone. There is a *Paraclete* alongside us, fighting with us and for us against whatever comes at us. This is God's wonderful and gracious gift to us...not only salvation that issues from Christ's death on the cross, but a constant presence that offers insight into truth, and peace in the midst of life's turmoil.

Of course, Pentecost provided more than that. The Holy Spirit propelled disciples around the globe; after all, Jesus had told them that they were to be his witnesses in

Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. People like Peter, and Philip and Saul and so many others were transformed into articulate ambassadors of grace, and people began to gather together into the church. The Holy Spirit equipped the believers to grow the church, as they began to reach out to others. Take a look at what happened in Jerusalem, and Antioch, and Philippi, and Corinth and around the Mediterranean world; consider what's happening today in Africa and Asia and South America... and even West Chester, Ohio. Pentecost was the day that God put an exclamation point on the Gospel, and it still echoes around the world today.

All of this was embodied in what Jesus spoke to his disciples, although they could scarcely even imagine it. All they could hear and what I want to say to you is this... that come what may, you'll not be left alone. Listen to what Jesus told his disciples, and speaks to us as well:

(read John 14:27)

This is one of the great promises of scripture- not that bad things will never happen to us, but that we can discover peace in the midst of it all... not as the world gives... not through anti-anxiety pills or various relaxation techniques or whatever... but through the *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter... who will give you a peace that passes understanding, and keep your hearts and minds focused on Christ.

And this, my friends, is God's gift to you... trust it, and use it well.