



John 16:4-15

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. Glenda Simpkins Hoffman
John 16:4-15

March 26 2017

LORD, GIVE ME
COFFEE
TO CHANGE THE
THINGS I CAN
CHANGE, AND
Wine
TO ACCEPT THE
THINGS I CAN'T.

Recently, while shopping, I happened to see a decorative item that said: “Lord, give me coffee to change the things I can and wine to accept the things I can’t.” At first, this picture made me chuckle. But, then, it made me sad because the truth is that many of us do depend on coffee for the energy we need to power through our days. And, as Pete pointed out last week, many rely on wine to quell the anxiety or pain that we often feel.

Coffee and wine are poor substitutes for what is really needed to face the challenges and difficulties of daily life, work, and relationships, not to mention the crises that we all face. What we really need is help and hope.

This week, I remembered one of my first crises. I was eleven when my dear aunt died at age 40. Except for my parents, she was the adult that I was closest to, so this was a huge loss for me and our entire family. The day after she died, I remember walking around our small town with my sister and friends who were talking, and I thought, “What are we doing? How can life possibly go on like normal after losing one so dear?”

Anyone who has grieved a deep loss knows some of the sorrow that is described in our passage for today. But listen to me carefully: it is impossible to overstate the crisis that the believing community faced as a result of Jesus’ death. The disciples were in deep sorrow about Jesus’ departure and dismayed about the future. This isn’t just about the loss of their teacher and friend. Jesus’ death and return to the Father marked the end of the incarnation as they had known it.

The disciples believed that Jesus was sent from the Father. They believed that Jesus was the incarnation and revelation of God with them. For three years, he was with them as they lived life together and experienced his powerful ministry of preaching, teaching, and manifesting the power of the kingdom. Now Jesus says, “The hour has come,” referring to his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Jesus seeks to prepare his disciples for life after he is gone as he returns to the Father.

The disciples believed Jesus was God with them, so they are wondering what happens when Jesus is gone? Was Jesus' revelation of God limited to one particular moment in history when Jesus was physically present, or does it have a future? Jesus answers their questions, allays their fears, and assures them that he will not leave them orphaned but will ask the Father to send another to be with them after he is gone. The promise of the Holy Spirit is Jesus' promise of God's ongoing presence, provision, peace. The Holy Spirit is God's help and hope for the future.

I like Dale Brunner's translation: "I am telling you the sober truth: the best thing that could ever happen to you is for me to go away. Because if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you. But if I do go away, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

"Paraclete" is the Greek word used for the Holy Spirit. The passive form of the word is used (*parakletos* Παράκλητος) and means "one who comes alongside." The way Paraclete is translated helps us to understand why we need the Holy Spirit to come alongside. We need an "Advocate," "Counselor," "Comforter," or "Helper" in all the circumstances of our lives.

The Paraclete is a person—the third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God who comes alongside us.

Now for those of you who are movie fans like me, it is imperative that we understand that the Holy Spirit is *not* an impersonal force like in *Star Wars* *nor* a source of magical power as in *Harry Potter*. The Paraclete is a person—

namely the third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God who comes alongside us.

I grew up going to church and repeating the Nicene Creed every week: "I believe in God the Father...Jesus Christ his only Son...and the Holy Spirit." I have to admit I didn't get who the

Holy Spirit was until I went to college, got involved in a campus ministry, and attended my first Bible study on the Holy Spirit. There I heard a quote by Billy Graham that 95 percent of believers do not understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit. I knew that was true for me. I knew Jesus had died for my past sins so I could have a future with him in heaven. However, I have to confess I thought that in this present life it was up to me to do the right thing and be good enough. I also knew that wasn't possible, so this was a problem that gave me a great deal of anxiety.

Learning about the person and work of the Holy Spirit was a true game-changer for me. What a joy and relief to know I was not alone nor on my own. God was with me and even in me to give me the help and hope I knew I needed. As I began to let go of my self-effort and let God be in control, I experienced the Holy Spirit filling me and giving me a deep sense of the presence, peace, and power that I never knew was possible.

Jesus told his disciples it was better that he go away because the Spirit could not come until Jesus completed his work and returned to the Father. The Paraclete's ministry is to make Jesus and his work present and available for the community in his absence. When Jesus became the incarnate Son of God, he was limited by time and space, but after he returns to the Father, the Holy Spirit comes and is everywhere. Now believers everywhere can experience the real presence and power and peace of Jesus not only with them but in them.

The Paraclete's ministry is to make Jesus and his work present and available for the community in his absence.

As Western, American Christians, we can interpret Scripture in an independent and individual manner, thinking Jesus is making this promise to *me* as an *individual* so *I* can experience this in *my* personal and private life. While that's true, it's not the whole truth. Throughout the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus uses the plural form of the word "you." It could be translated with the Southern phrase

“all you all.” Jesus’ ongoing presence and work will continue through the Holy Spirit in the collective community of believers.

When I first became acquainted with the campus ministry I spoke of earlier, I have to confess I loved going to their weekly meetings to hear the teaching, but I felt uncomfortable with the sharing and singing. It just wasn’t the style I was accustomed to. So, I would sneak into the meetings after the teaching started and quickly leave before it was over so I didn’t have to talk to anyone.

Leaders in the group were patient and persistent in reaching out to me, getting to know me, inviting and including me in activities. I soon learned and experienced that it is in *community life* and *shared ministry* that the Holy Spirit works and witnesses so powerfully. That was certainly true in my life then and continues to be true today.

The church is the corporate people of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit *together*. We experience God’s presence and manifest His power as we arrange our lives to worship *together*, live in *community together*, and serve each other and the world *together* in dependence on the Holy Spirit. We are becoming like Christ *together* for the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“And when that Person arrives, he will show how wrong the world is about what is wrong (sin), about what is right (righteousness), and about who won (judgment)...

John 16.8

So what does the Holy Spirit actually do? Again, I like Dale Brunner’s translation: “And when that Person arrives, he will show how wrong the world is about what is wrong (sin), about what is right (righteousness), and about who won (judgment):

The “world” is not a neutral term, but means “that which is opposed to God in Jesus.” The language used here suggests a courtroom in which the Holy Spirit serves as both the defender of God’s people and also the prosecutor against the world. What the Holy Spirit does is expose or bring out into the open the true

meaning of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Let's take each of these points one at a time.

What is really **most wrong** with the world? We can think of a lot of things. I'm sure we could make a long list. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convict or show the world *what is most wrong, namely, that they do not believe in me*. If Jesus really is God in the flesh who has visited our earth to save us and reconcile us to God for eternity, then the refusal to believe Jesus, who is the greatest of all world realities is the greatest of all wrongs.



The refusal to believe Jesus.

If we are honest, we all have to admit we are still a little in the world. We often think of "believing in Jesus" as a matter of personal taste or preference. But believing in Jesus is the fundamental issue of life. It is only belief in Jesus that brings us into relationship with God.

No one can be convinced of this on their own. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict, but the Holy Spirit uses the people of God, the church, to share this good news as we live, proclaim, and teach in an urgent way about the need for Jesus.

Today is confirmation Sunday. These students have already been baptized. At that time, their parents and the community of faith promised to nurture and guide them in the faith. The Holy Spirit is the one who has been working through the family as well as the Sunday school teachers, small groups leaders, and others in the community of faith to teach, preach, and witness to their need for Jesus. Now these confirmands are ready, willing, and wanting to affirm their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior at this very important moment in their lives. This illustrates the important work of the Spirit in community. Let's look at the next point.

What is **really right** about the world? If you were to make another list, this, too, might be very long. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will reveal *what is right, namely, that I am going to the Father and you are no longer seeing me* (16:10). In essence, he is saying that he is about to complete the mission that he was sent by the Father to do: to reconcile human beings back to God. When

Jesus' entire career is the single most right thing that ever happened in world history.

Jesus is gone, then the Spirit will come, who will reveal that Jesus' entire career is the single most right thing that ever happened in world history. This is really good news. By grace, Jesus has accomplished for us what

we could not accomplish on our own, in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Dale Brunner points out that when Jesus uses the phrase, "I am going to the Father," he is in essence saying in a modest way, "I am going to do the most important, helpful, and just deed that has ever been done for and in the world this weekend." Jesus has conquered our greatest of human problems—death and meaninglessness—giving us life and purpose. This is true righteousness. We can rest in him. Now, the final question:

Who really won? In life, it all too often appears that the ruler of the world wins. But now our courtroom scene moves to this most fundamental of all Supreme Court decisions as Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will reveal *who won, namely, that the ruler of this world has been soundly condemned*. (16:11).

The Holy Spirit encourages the Church to live, preach, and teach that in Jesus the victory is won.

In Jesus, the ruler of the world, the devil, the embodiment of all that is opposed to God, is defeated. In Jesus, God is victorious. The ruler of the world has been decisively sentenced and condemned by history's two central events—Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection. The ruler of the world was judged in the past at

Jesus' hour. It's done; it's finished, and that judgement continues into the present in the faith community by the power of the Holy Spirit. The devil doesn't have the power to drag us down unless we let him. That doesn't mean we don't have temptations or trials or disappointments or difficulties. But it does mean we don't have to live in defeat or discouragement. We can live with faith in Jesus and experience confidence and joy and peace no matter what our circumstances because in Jesus the ultimate victory is won.

Just before my senior year in college, my brother died in an Air Force jet crash. It was a very sad and painful time for me and my family. I noticed that dealing with this grief was far different than the earlier experience in my life. As we sat as a family with our pastor and planned the funeral service, I had this overwhelming sense of God's presence, and I experienced "the peace of God that surpasses comprehension" (Philippians 4:7). It was another affirmation of Jesus' promise that I am not alone and I am not on my own. The Holy Spirit is always with me.

Now let's look at verses 12-15 as Jesus continues speaking: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

**The Spirit of truth will guide you
into all the truth.**



Jesus doesn't tell the disciples everything because they do not have the capacity to receive, understand, or live all the truth that Jesus had to give. Jesus guided the disciples into truth when he was with them, but he promised that after he was gone *the Spirit of truth will guide them into all the truth*. The Spirit of Truth would come to help them moment by moment to know, say, and do what is needed.

The image of a tour guide is very helpful here. A year ago, a group from our church went to Ireland. We had done reading and studying to prepare for our journey so we could get the most out of it, but you don't know what you don't know until you actually get to a destination. So it was very beneficial to have a delightful Irishman as our tour guide.

He was with us the entire journey from our arrival until our departure. He knew where we were going and how to get there, and worked with our bus driver to ensure we got to where we needed to be safely and on time. And he knew a lot of information about the places we were going to see, and pointed out things that were important as well as things he thought we would enjoy. His presence was an important aspect of keeping our community together, providing for our needs, and leading and guiding us. But his presence also gave us a lot of joy in the journey and peace knowing we were not alone or on our own.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus' presence with us, guiding us on the journey of life, giving us the truth, bringing to mind what we need to know when we need to know it, revealing what we are to do when it's time to do it, and giving us joy, perspective, peace, and power moment by moment in every situation in life to ensure that we are indeed following Jesus.

Jesus also makes clear that *the Spirit of Truth...will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.* To be an official tour guide in most places, you have to be licensed.

The Spirit of Truth will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.

Is your tourist guide licensed?

- ✓ Please check if your guide is licensed!
- ✗ Unqualified guiding is illegal in Turkey
- ✓ For consumer rights always ask for licensed guides.

All licensed tourist guides must wear their official badges during tours.

<http://www.tureb.org.tr/tr/RehberVeritabani>

Important tourist destinations such as Ireland or D.C. do not want just anyone sharing their opinions. They want people who are well-informed, trained, and equipped with facts about the historical and cultural significance of places so that they are able to share the truth.

The Holy Spirit will never give you isolated truth. He will not come out with some startling, brand-new, absolutely different revelation which nobody has ever heard of before! The Spirit speaks only what he hears and it will always align with what God has said in the past through his revelation in Jesus and in his inspired Word, but the truth will fit into the context of life.

This is so important, friends, because we are surrounded by outer voices in our culture and even inner, broken voices from our past that can be disorienting and even painful. We need to be able to recognize what is truth and what isn't true. That is why we need to study the Word of God so we can we learn God's truth and become familiar with the way God speaks.

Two times in my life, at significant points of transition, I have had people tell me, "This is God's will for your life," but I knew it wasn't true or from the Holy Spirit because I knew it wasn't consistent with what God said in His word or the way He would say it.

On the other hand, just this week I had a conversation with someone who has known me for over 15 years, and she spoke truth into my life. She didn't try to change or fix me or tell me what to do. She listened, asked questions, and gave me support and

perspective. I knew her words were from the Holy Spirit to me because what she said was consistent with what God has already said in His word.

**The Spirit of
Truth will
declare to you
the things that
are to come.**



Finally, *the Spirit of Truth... will declare to you the things that are to come.* This is not about foretelling the future. Rather, the Holy Spirit is God's presence with us.

The Spirit will continue to proclaim the teachings of Jesus to us in the new and changing circumstances of life. This is good news. Jesus' words are not locked in the past or restricted to a particular historic moment when Jesus was alive. The promise is that the Holy Spirit, through the life of the community, will ensure that all believers' futures are open to fresh proclamations of Jesus' words.

I have seen in my own life how the Holy Spirit has guided me into truth in many past circumstances of my life as I have moved many times from place to place and experience to experience, grieved the death of loved ones, experienced the pain of infertility, suffered illness and financial stress. The Holy Spirit was with me, helping me.

But now I am in new circumstances, parenting children through the teenage years, supporting aging parents as they decline, and doing work I've never done before. Some days I feel very squeezed and overwhelmed by the fact that I am in unfamiliar territory and often don't know what I am doing or where I am going. But Jesus' words to his disciples on the night before he died are words for me right here, right now, and they are words for you, too. We are not alone, and we are not on our own. Jesus is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit helping us and guiding us in our real, everyday life experiences. No matter what you may face, no matter what you are going through, you, too, can experience the ongoing presence, power, and peace for whatever may come.

In closing, I invite you to join me in a prayer to the Holy Spirit. Not only do we use this prayer in the Great Banquet, but some churches use it on Pentecost Sunday, and I even heard Desmond Tutu pray this prayer in an interview on Public Radio. It is a fitting closing for us today.

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations. Through Christ our Lord.
AMEN.*