

<sup>26</sup> “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also are going to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

## Helper

It was the dumb end of the board and there I was holding it. The dumb end of the board is the end that does nothing. At that point I was the equivalent of a dead man only I could move and support the panel that extended off the edge of the saw. A dead man is a fixture for holding the dumb end of the board while a co-worker measures, marks, and makes the cut to the smart end of the board. It takes no special skill or ability to hold a board – in fact it’s often a job relegated to the least skilled, the temp workers, and new guys but there I was helping by holding the dumb end waiting for my co-worker to make a cut.

For some reason that’s how we see all helpers. Often the role of helper is diminished and made a minor role, less of a person, a helper delegated to dumb ends. The sad part is when we transfer this definition of helper to our God who describes himself multiple times as our “Helper.” Is that the Holy Spirit? Verse 26 – “When the Advocate comes...” Has been translated, transliterated, and left un-translated. KJV – Comforter. ESV – Helper, MSG – Friend, EHV – Counselor, and finally there are even some who simply use the Greek Paraclete.

Whatever the case and whatever the translation – the Holy Spirit isn’t holding the dumb end of the board when it comes to your salvation. And yet he is often relegated to the menial work among Christians or completely forgotten. Jesus promise to send a helper means more than someone to hold up the other end. He helps those who are unable to help themselves. He is a gift to be treasured. He is our Helper.

The Holy Spirit is here to help and so was Jesus. Jesus is preparing to leave his disciples. This lesson takes us back to Holy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter. In just a few short hours he will be betrayed by Judas into the hands of men. During this prep talk he reminds them, “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first.*” The world will hate you. You will be persecuted because of your association with me. They hated me for no reason. That doesn’t sound like fun but Jesus is talking about gifts. There is this promise. That’s what the day of Pentecost is all about. It’s about the Risen and ascended Lord sending the Paraclete, the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to the church – to help in several ways.

He is known as the advocate, comforter, helper, friend, counselor. These are all valid translations. The paraclete is the Greek and it means para kalew – to call along side. One who comes along side another. One who stands by you, who is with you. A big brother. A lawyer. Your defense. That means he is there to come along side us and help us. He helps us by being a witness to Jesus, and guiding us in the truth. This is the Spirit of Truth and he He teaches the truth. He testifies about Jesus, the way, the truth, the life.

So where is the Holy Spirit and how do we get him? I haven't heard a rushing of winds or seen tongues of fire on any heads. And yet the Holy Spirit has been given to each one of us at our Baptism. That was our personal Pentecost, when we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior* (Titus 3:5). Still uncertain, *“no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:3).

But there are some that emphasize, speaking in tongues, healings, direct revelations. Some teach that these tangible experiences of the Spirit are necessary to be sure that you have the Holy Spirit. Rather than witness about Jesus and his work on the cross look to these works of the Spirit to validate their faith. From personal experiences to the “still, small voice” of the Spirit speaking outside of the Holy Scripture, we may believe the lie. That's the same lie that God speaks directly to the pope in Rome, the same lie when the Evangelical says, “The Lord has laid it on my heart to say...” We may give the Spirit the dumb end of the board and say, “Here hold this!” while I go off and do something even more foolish. Diminish his job, minimize his work, and place ourselves center stage. “I have to accept him into my heart.” Again... “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.” Well then maybe he does some other menial work to make me look better. But that's not the point or purpose of the Holy Spirit.

It may exciting that the Holy Spirit would speak directly to us outside of God's Word but what happens when you feel led by the spirit to sin, adultery, abortion, or reject any other clear teaching of God's Word? This can lead to confusion, doubt and sin. These subjective experiences leave us uncertain about God, forgiveness, and salvation. If a church teaches that speaking in tongues is a sure sign that you are saved, and yet you've never received the gift of tongues, what must you believe about the state of your soul?

The truth is we put the Spirit and ourselves at the wrong end of the board on a regular basis. We can't choose to accept Jesus into our heart and when we can – he's already there. Our condition before the Helper comes is one of needing help. We're dead. Unable to help ourselves. That's why we need a helper. You don't typically help someone who has no need for help but Jesus knows his disciples and he sends another helper.

And that helper doesn't need to tell you anymore about yourself. *"The Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me."* He gives witness to Jesus and his work for you. He gives glory to Jesus. He works through the means of grace: God's Word and Sacrament. He points us not to our faith but to the object of our faith, to Jesus and he keeps us in that faith until the day we die. He guides us in all truth.

The truth isn't whatever happens to be true for you. That would be relative truth and that's subjective and uncertain. That's your truth. Truth is objective. In order for anything to be true it must correspond to reality. The Spirit of Truth testifies to the truth of God's Word which is certain and firm and you can build your lives on it. It is this word that unites the church providing clarity and certainty in contrast to the thoughts, emotions, that can mislead, create confusion, and doubt.

Jesus has sent us the Spirit from the Father. It's the greatest gift the church has for without him there would be no church. What we find at the first Pentecost isn't confusion but a reversal of the curse of Babel. This news of Jesus is meant for the world and not just those in Jerusalem. It's good news for you. And it's for you because the disciples proclaimed the good news to others. They also testified about Jesus. And those who were terrified

The reason you and even I know is because someone told me, taught me, and the Holy Spirit worked through their words. Here in his word he reminds us that we are forgiven for trying to give him the dumb end of the board when he has clearly taken it out of our hands and hit us with it – knocking some sense into us. We are forgiven and reassured again and again by the Spirit through Baptism and Lord's Supper. We are forgiven and pointed back to the objective facts of his Word. While we'd like to believe that we are God's greatest gift to humanity, that's a spot that is better left reserved for the Spirit. Christianity points us away from ourselves to our Savior.

The Holy Spirit is unconcerned about our emotional high or divine guidance when it comes to who we should marry or what we should do in life. It seems as if those are left to free will and we are free to serve God through our life of faith. But the Holy Spirit wants better for us, *“A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead into an inheritance that will never perish spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you”* (1 Peter 1:3,4). He does not empower people for His own glory or to show off His abilities. Nor does he empower us to show off.

He bears witness about Jesus so that you too can be witnesses as well. And that is what you continue to do at home, in your lives, and even abroad. Our small synod is at work in 40 nations around the globe. More groups are coming to us for theological training. We’ve already half way to reaching our goal for a seminary in Hanoi. These all point to the Holy Spirit at work in your life. It points to the fact that Christians are witnesses and they do care for others. We don’t simply provide humanitarian aid but we share an inheritance that will never perish spoil or fade. We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to use us, help us witness to the world by directing our attention to Jesus – the author and perfecter of faith.

Whichever end of the board you’re holding onto remember a helper isn’t useless. A helper is often necessary even wanted when the board that’s being cut can’t easily be replaced because it’s LEED certified and shipped from Europe. We all need help. We’ve all been helped. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us we can be a help to others, but not for us and our glory, but for God. Amen.