

So who is this new Advocate? It is the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The old King James Version calls him a “Comforter,” while other translations call him a “Helper” or a “Counselor.” The Greek word is *paraklete*, a noun derived from the verb *parakaleo*. *Kaleo* means to call or direct someone. *Para* means to come alongside in order to support (think of the English words paralegal or paramedic). Notice the tension here. To “call” someone is forceful. It is active, not passive. You are pointing someone toward a truth or toward a goal. It’s not just talking or even asking; it’s pressing toward something. And yet, to “come alongside” means to be sympathetic, to be in a relationship, to stand in someone’s shoes. The word is a union of prophetic challenge and priestly support.

That’s how Jesus defines God’s Spirit, this “other” Advocate who will come to us. But notice Jesus’ words here: he reminds us that he is the First Advocate, and the Spirit is the Second Advocate. We must consider the work of the two together, they complement each other, and unless we understand the work of one, we cannot understand the work of the other.

Let’s take Jesus first. What did Jesus do on the cross? We would answer, “Jesus dies for our sins so that we might be forgiven.” And we’d be right. But by calling himself an Advocate, Jesus implies that his death was a more radical act than we think. Jesus implies, first, that there is a bar of justice somewhere, a kind of universal, divine court before which we all stand. This is what the Bible teaches. We all stand judged. There is a standard set for our lives, a yardstick against which we will all be measured. Which should give us some pause, for we know we all fall short, we make mistakes, we fail, we are fools, and we are not what or who God intends for us to be. So what hope is there for us?

The hope comes from having Jesus as our Advocate. Jesus did not come to be a good example (though he is that) or to be a loving supporter (though he is that, too), but to be our Advocate. Think of what an advocate does for you. If you are accused of a crime and you go to court, there is a sense in which, before the court, your defense attorney is you. As theologian Charles Hodge once wrote, in court you disappear into your advocate. If you stammer in court, but your lawyer is eloquent, how do you appear to the court? Eloquent. If you are ignorant, but your lawyer is brilliant, what do you look like in court? Brilliant. In some cases you may not even be required to speak or appear personally in court: your lawyer appears in your place, as your substitute. So what do you look like in court? You look like your advocate. If your advocate wins, you win. If your advocate loses, you lose. In short, you’re lost in your advocate – you are in your advocate.

So as sinners before the bar of God’s justice, we do not need a good example or a sympathetic hand-holder: we need an Advocate to appear for us before God. When I was a younger Christian I had this idea that Jesus “intercedes” for me before God. I got this idea from the book of Hebrews, and I had this mental image of Jesus saying to God, “Good morning, Father. I represent Doug Dent. My client, I admit, is having a very bad week. He’s broken three or four promises he made to you, and maybe a commandment or two (not any of the big ones!). He deserves to be punished, but could you give him a break? For my sake? I’m asking you to give him another chance.”

Now, that sounds pretty good, but the problem is that Jesus is simply pleading for another chance. How long can Jesus keep doing that for me? And how long will God keep offering second chances before God’s patience is exhausted. As a fallible human being, what I really need is someone who has a real case to make, a much better case than mine. I need Jesus, who *is the atoning sacrifice for our sins* (1 John 2:2).

So when Jesus goes before God, he is not actually asking for mercy for me, because God has already shown me mercy in sending Jesus to die for me. With mercy shown, Jesus does not need to beg for it again. 1 John 1:9 says, *If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive our sins*. It does not say that if Christians confess their sins God forgives because God gives them a second chance. No, it says God forgives because God is faithful and just. To not forgive would be unjust.

The best way to get an acquittal for your client is not to hope you can get some sympathy from the court. The best way is to show that your client must be acquitted under the law. If we put our faith in Jesus, then the law of God works for us, not against us. We sinned, but God mercifully sent Jesus to die in our place. What Jesus did, his work on the cross, is transferred to our account. Now the law of God demands our acquittal: God must forgive because Christ, who is sinless, paid the price for our sins. When God looks at us, God sees us “in Christ” our Advocate. That’s an airtight case. The job of Jesus, the first Advocate, is to say to God, “Look at what I’ve done. Now, accept them in me.”

So what, then, is the job of the Second Advocate? The first Advocate speaks to God for us, but the second Advocate is speaking to us for us. At the Last Supper, Jesus repeatedly says that the job of the Spirit is to take all the things Jesus has done for us and to “teach” us and “remind” us and enable us to finally understand all that Jesus said and did (14:26).

Theologian J. J. Packer says the Holy Spirit’s ministry is much like that of a floodlight. If you walk by a beautiful building at night and it’s floodlit, you say, “Look at that beautiful building.” You may not even see the floodlight itself. The floodlight’s job is not to show you itself, but to show you the beauty of the building, to throw all of its features into relief. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will come to teach us the deep, life-changing truth that God loves us and Christ died for us so that we might be fully restored.

But this second Advocate isn’t finished when such knowledge is imparted; the Spirit calls us to live according to what he is telling us. The Spirit convicts and challenges us (John 16:8-11). The Spirit says in effect “You are a sinner – are you living with the humility and dependence on God that results from that fact? Yet you are also righteous in Christ – adopted and accepted into the family. Are you living with the boldness and freedom that should come with that status? Are you as free from the need for worldly power and approval and comfort as you should be?” It is the job of the second Advocate to argue with us in the court of our heart, to make the case about who we are in Christ, and to show how rich life can be for those who are “in Christ.” And it’s our job to listen.

The Spirit-Advocate argues with us, exhorts us, beseeches us, and entreats us to live lives in accordance with the accomplishments and realities of Christ’s love. And this is why Jesus says that through the Holy Spirit he will finally “show” himself to his friends (14:21). The apostles did not – could not – truly know Jesus until he went away bodily and returned through the Holy Spirit. This is hugely encouraging for modern day Christians who often believe it would have been better or easier if they had lived and talked and prayed with Jesus during his time on earth. John’s Gospel says that right here and now, through the Holy Spirit, we can see Jesus and know his presence and his love better than the apostles could in that moment in the upper room.

That’s what Jesus told his disciples in the upper room. This was his lifeline to those who had failed him in life and would change the world after his death. “Believe in me and receive the Spirit when I am gone. Listen to him about my infallible case and he will give you an infallible peace.” Whether or not you yet consider yourself a spiritual descendant of those first disciples, these words are meant for you as well. God wants to ensure that you are part of the kingdom-work God is doing right now, which is why God sent two advocates to guide you.

This sermon is inspired by Timothy Keller. *Encounters with Jesus*. (New York, Dutton, 2013), 127-148.

The Two Advocates

Trinity Sunday, June 15, 2014
The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

John 14:16-20, 25-27

When we think of Jesus’ last evening with his disciples, we normally think of the Last Supper in the upper room. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us a great deal about the Supper itself – the location, the guests, the food – but John never mentions the meal at all. John is more concerned with the dinner conversation.

Over the previous three years, the apostles had an ongoing personal encounter with Jesus. They lived and worked with him, they talked and prayed with him. But now Jesus said, *I will be with you only a little longer...Where I am going you cannot come* (John 13:33). This statement touches off expressions of alarm among the disciples. Peter says he will follow Jesus wherever he goes (13:37). Thomas says he doesn’t know where Jesus is going, so how can he come? (14:5) When Jesus responds that he is going to his Father’s house (14:2-3), Philip asks Jesus to “show us the Father” (14:8). By their banter about the table, the disciples prove that they really don’t know Jesus at all: they have little understanding of Jesus’ heart and purpose.

This is a problem. These are Jesus’ handpicked agents, the ones who will take his message to the world. Yet they don’t really know him, and the following day he will die. What hope is there that they will ever know him and carry his message forward? Then Jesus reveals that there is hope “another Advocate” who will come to help them when Jesus is gone.