

THE HELPER

John 14:32-31

The Day of Pentecost (Series C)

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The Gospel lesson for the Day of Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 14, verses 23 through 31. In this gospel lesson, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 14, beginning at verse 23, we read in Jesus' name.

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the major themes of the Day of Pentecost is the gift of the Holy Spirit to all Christians.

Pentecost is a festival that traces back into the Old Testament, all the way back to the time of the Exodus. It was one of the three major feasts that the LORD commanded the Israelites to observe when he brought them into the Promised Land. It was a little bit like our Thanksgiving. One of the Old Testament names for it is "The Feast of Ingathering." The Israelites made thanksgiving sacrifices from the first of their crops.

The Christian observance of Pentecost comes more from what happened in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection. It occurred exactly seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection. We read about this from Acts 2. There were Jews from all over the world who had come to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit descended on the Christians; there were about 120 of them in Jerusalem at that time. The Holy Spirit descended on them, and they began to declare the mighty works of God in all the native languages of these visitors. It was a miracle, because these Christians did not previously know those languages. So it amazed the crowd. This was, in one sense, an unnecessary miracle, because all of the visitors would have at least spoken Greek, which was the common trade language of the entire Mediterranean region at the time, or

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Aramaic, which was the common local language in Israel. Most of them probably knew both, because it would have been hard to get to Jerusalem without Greek, and it would have been hard to be in Jerusalem without Aramaic. But the Holy Spirit enabled these Christians to speak in all the native languages of these visitors. So it was, in a sense, an unnecessary miracle, which actually makes it much more interesting. It means there was a reason for this miracle other than basic communication.

It did two things: First, it drew attention to the message of these Christians. If you ever witness a miracle, you pay attention to the source. So this miracle caused the people to listen to the Gospel. Second, it indicated that the gospel these Christians proclaimed is for the entire world. It wasn't just for Jews. If that were the case, it would have only been proclaimed in Aramaic. But it was proclaimed in all the languages of these visitors to indicate that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people.

And this is how the Christian observance of Pentecost connects with the Old Testament Feast of Ingathering. The Holy Spirit was gathering believers from all over the world. It was the beginning of the Holy Spirit's harvest season. That season continues today, and it will continue until Jesus returns. This point is driven home at the end of the Pentecost story in Acts 2. Peter preaches, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, and for your children, and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:38-39).

So Pentecost has these two main themes. First, the Gospel is for all people. It is for every nation, every language, and every family under heaven. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13). Forgiveness of sins and everlasting salvation are for all who trust in Jesus. That's the first main theme of Pentecost.

Second, the Holy Spirit is given to every Christian. You may not speak in other languages like those Christians at Pentecost did. In fact, you probably won't. The three thousand souls who were baptized that day don't seem to have spoken in other tongues. And the gift of tongues is only mentioned a couple other times in the Bible, and it was always to indicate that the Holy Spirit was gathering Christians from other nations. But the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to all Christians. Peter makes that promise at Pentecost, and Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 12, where he teaches about spiritual gifts. There are various spiritual gifts, but he says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (v. 7). If you have been baptized, and if you trust in Jesus, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So who is the Holy Spirit? And what does he do?

First of all, the Holy Spirit is God. He is one of the three persons of the Trinity. We'll talk more about this next week, since next week is Trinity Sunday, but we can't help but notice the doctrine of the Trinity in this Gospel lesson. Jesus talks about the Father. He talks about how the Father sent him. He talks about the love between the Father and himself. He talks about how he is returning to the Father. And he also promises the Holy Spirit. So we see, very clearly, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this text. The third person of the Holy Trinity is the Holy Spirit.

And what does the Holy Spirit do? Each member of the Trinity has their own special work. They are each God, so they each possess the full power and glory of God. And they participate in the work with one another, but they each have their own special work. The three special works are creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Father is the Creator. He did not create alone; the Son and Holy Spirit also participated in creation. But that is the Father's special work. He is

also the giver of all good things. The Son is the Redeemer. The Father and the Holy Spirit also participated in redemption, but the Son, Jesus Christ, is the one who bore our sins and died for them. And the Holy Spirit is the sanctifier. That's maybe the most obscure word of the three. To sanctify means "to set apart." The Holy Spirit sets us apart to belong to God. He's the member of the Trinity who calls us to faith through the Gospel and preserves us in the faith. That's what it means that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.

In this gospel lesson, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Jesus says the Father will send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name (14:25). Elsewhere, just a couple chapters later, Jesus also promises that he will send the Holy Spirit. So in one place he says that the Father will send the Holy Spirit, and in another place he says that he will send the Holy Spirit. This difference might not seem like a big deal, but there was a time in Church history when it was a huge deal.

So a little tidbit for the Church history buffs, or just people who like weird, interesting facts. This was actually one of the main reasons for the split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church almost a thousand years ago. Prior to that, the vast majority of Christians in the world were united in one organization. But in 1054, they split. The western churches called themselves "Catholic," which means "universal" or "one" church, while the eastern churches called themselves "orthodox," which means "correct." So it was kind of an ancient version of "I'm rubber, you're glue, what you say bounces off me and sticks back on you." The one side said, "We're the *one* Church," while the other side said, "Oh, yeah? Well, we're the *correct* Church." I think it's kind of funny. Anyway, historians call this the "Great Schism." There were a number of reasons for the split, but the top reason on many lists was this disagreement over who sends the Holy Spirit. Does the Father send the Holy Spirit? Or do the Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit. The Eastern Orthodox churches look at this passage and say, "See, Jesus says the Father sends the Holy Spirit." But the western churches, which includes Roman Catholics and, in the last five hundred years, Lutherans and Protestants too, point to other passages where Jesus says that he will send the Holy Spirit (e.g., 16:7), and we say, "No, it's both the Father and the Son."

I suppose the reason this became such a big deal was because it's part of the Nicene Creed. Whenever they confessed the Nicene Creed, which was probably every Sunday, there was this difference between them. The eastern Christians would say the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father," while western Christians would say he "proceeds from the Father and the Son." I know a lot of people today don't really care, but I think it's kind of interesting.

And I especially find it interesting that, a thousand years ago, this was a big enough issue to at least contribute to the biggest church split in history, while most Christians today would just say, "Who cares?" Actually, we should care for the simple reason that we want our God to be spoken of rightly. Christians today have a tendency of not worrying too much about doctrines that don't seem to affect us. If we don't see the practical impact it makes on our lives, we don't give much thought to it. That's actually kind of narcissistic. That is, it's self-centered to only care about a doctrine if we can see how it affects us. We should care for the simple reason that we want our God to be spoken of rightly. It's a matter of honor.

Let me give you an example. Imagine this with me. Suppose someone were writing a biography of your father, so he interviews you and your siblings to get some information. But you and your sister can't agree on whether your father was born in Cleveland or Philadelphia. Does it really matter? Not in the sense that it affects your daily life, but you want your father to be spoken of rightly. It's a matter of honor. So you're not going to tell the biographer to just

write whatever he wants, and you're certainly not going to split the difference and say it was Pittsburgh. You're going to investigate a little bit in order to figure out the right answer, which, by the way, is Cleveland, and my sister and I have never actually argued about this.

In the same way, we should care about everything God has revealed about himself. If we believe that God is real, and if we love him, we should want him to be spoken of rightly. It's a matter of honor. We should care whether the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father only or also by the Son. It might not be something that should split the Church, but it is something we should care about. And I wish I could tell you why this little point of doctrine matters, but I can't. All I can say is that in this passage, Jesus promises that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his name, and in another passage, Jesus says that he will send the Holy Spirit. And that's why we confess in the creed that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son."

Other times, doctrine is more obviously practical. And we have some of that in this passage too. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Helper." Your translation might say something like "Comforter," "Counselor," or "Advocate." That's because the original word can mean a lot of different things. So "Helper" is probably the most literal translation for the simple reason that it's broad enough to include all the possible meanings.

We use the word "helper" in a lot of different ways. It can range from little helps to big helps. It could be something as little as Hamburger Helper. Or a helper might be an assistant, like if you help your dad fix the dryer. You might help someone change a tire on the side of the road. You might go to a counselor to get some help. Or you might fall down and have to call for help. In some cases, a helper is much more than a little thing. When we have to call for help, a helper could really be as much as a savior. So it's no slight to the Holy Spirit when Jesus calls him our "Helper." He's the big kind of helper. He's the kind of helper we would be lost without.

Some Bible translations kind of gave up trying to translate this word and just used the Greek word, "paraclyte" (παράκλητος). It means someone who is called to come beside you. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He comes alongside you. You might not sense his presence, and that's okay, but Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to every believer. And Jesus makes good on this promise at your Baptism. That's what the Apostle Peter teaches us in his Pentecost sermon. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). You have the gift of the Holy Spirit. And you always have him.

The Holy Spirit is our teacher. For Jesus' apostles, this meant something very specific. Jesus said, "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (14:26). There are some places where it's important for us to remember who Jesus was talking to when he made a promise. And this is definitely one of those places. Jesus does not promise that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things, at least, not in the same way as he did for Jesus' apostles. For the apostles, the Holy Spirit taught them directly, and he brought to their remembrance the things Jesus had taught them. This is how we know this was a specific promise for the apostles. The Holy Spirit doesn't bring to our remembrance things we weren't there to hear in the first place. This was a special promise for the apostles. But the Holy Spirit did this so that these apostles could write the New Testament for us. And for much of what the apostles wrote, it wasn't like the Holy Spirit revealed new teachings to them. Instead, he caused them to remember the things Jesus had already said to them. These were probably things they did not understand at first. But the Holy Spirit enabled them to remember them and understand them through the lens of Jesus' death and resurrection. And so the Holy Spirit inspired them to write the Scriptures.

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And this is how the Holy Spirit continues to teach us. He teaches us through the words that have been written for us and handed down to us.

In our sinful pride, we might be kind of disappointed by the ordinariness of this. It would be much more exciting if the Holy Spirit was constantly revealing new things to us, things he hadn't previously revealed. That would really make us feel special. But that would also be really confusing, because we wouldn't really know what was coming from the Holy Spirit, or what was coming from our own sinful desires. But when we look to the Scriptures for the Holy Spirit's teaching, we have certainty that we are hearing the truth.

And the Holy Spirit is still at work in this. It's not like he just inspired the Scriptures and then left us alone. He continues to attend to his Word. He still teaches us. He helps us to understand it. But more than that, he also teaches us to believe it. He teaches our hearts. Through the Scriptures, he teaches our minds to know that Jesus is Lord. This is rather ordinary. But in a more miraculous sense, he teaches our hearts to trust it.

We don't always notice his presence. In fact, most of the time, when the Holy Spirit is doing his work, we don't notice him. It's a little bit like the air conditioner in your house. You don't notice it when it's working. Or it's more like a speaker system. When it's working right, you don't pay any attention to it. You pay attention to what's coming through it. The Holy Spirit is kind of like that, because his work is to point us to Jesus. That's what's coming through. When the Holy Spirit is working, we notice Jesus. That's really the Holy Spirit's work. He teaches our hearts to trust what he has revealed in the Scriptures. In this way, the Holy Spirit is our teacher, counselor, and comforter.

And since we don't always notice his work, it's appropriate at times, like on Pentecost, to take a step back and say, "Oh, yeah, the Holy Spirit has taught me to trust in Jesus." And this comforts us too, because we do not cause ourselves to believe. The Holy Spirit calls us to faith through the Gospel. He enlightens our hearts. And he preserves us in the faith. He does all this through the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit is all about Jesus. That's what the Holy Spirit cares about. He cares about you believing in Jesus and being saved. This is the great help he provides. The Holy Spirit's great desire is that you would know this: Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He was crucified with your sin in his body. That sin was destroyed in Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead, and he promises that same kind of life to you. The Holy Spirit brings forgiveness and everlasting life to all who trust in Jesus. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.