

THE ADVENT OF THE COMFORTER  
A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter, 2011  
On the Text: Propers for the Day  
By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

Every year, in late November or early December, we begin a season of penitence and preparation that we call Advent. In Advent we prepare ourselves spiritually for our celebration of the Incarnation of God in the birth of the baby Jesus. In our Gospel lesson for today, the mature Jesus, on the night before he died on the Cross, speaks of the beginning of another Advent, the Advent, or coming, of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

There are some parallels here with Advent and Christmas. Each year on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, nine months before Christmas, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Annunciation, the day on which the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she would give birth to Jesus, but we do not begin Advent until the fourth Sunday before Christmas.

Last Sunday, we saw that everything in the Gospel of St. John from the first verse of Chapter 13 to the 27<sup>th</sup> verse of Chapter 18 takes place on Maundy Thursday or before dawn on Good Friday. Our Gospel lesson for today is from the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. John's Gospel, so we know that what is described in that chapter, what Jesus said, was said sometime that night. So, we are told of the coming of the Comforter some time before His arrival, but Jesus did not tell the disciples when the Comforter would come. That "some" time is not a fixed time because the Holy Spirit's arrival did not have to wait through the gestation of a human baby as did the Incarnation of the Son of God. As we know, the Spirit arrived in force in a rush of wind and flames on Pentecost, has not left, and takes up residence in all believers.

So, we have an announcement of His coming on a Holy day before His coming, and He comes on another Holy Day some time later – good conditions for an Advent season, which, unfortunately would conflict with the Easter season.

This morning, I cannot give you many stories from real life today to illustrate the lesson I want to give you. That is because our focus is on the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, who as a spirit is never seen; we only see the effects of His actions. Much of what we know about Him comes from what Jesus has to say about Him, and much of that comes from the Gospel lessons of the Easter season, so this sermon will be something of a Bible Study on the Gospel lesson.

There is something we should take note of about the Gospel lessons for the Sundays after Easter: Every one of them, including the one for Pentecost is from the Gospel of St. John. Now this is not true for the special days of the week, but it is true for the Sundays.

The Gospel lesson for the first Sunday after Easter is about Jesus' appearance in the locked upper room when Thomas was not there. The second is about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The third we heard last Sunday, that for a while the disciples would not see Him, and they would not be happy, but that then they would see Him again. Today we are told by Jesus that He must leave them so that the Comforter, whom He will send, can come. In the Gospels for the next two Sundays, he tells the disciples more that they need to know, first about some general things and then again about the Comforter. Then on Pentecost, or Whitsunday, as we Anglicans are wont to call it, the Comforter does come, which is described in the Epistle lesson for that day; but again, there is more description of the Comforter from St. John's Gospel. Another thing about these Gospel lessons is that three of them come from the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. John's Gospel, while another starts in Chapter 15 and ends in Chapter 16. I think we should get the message that Chapter 16 of St. John's Gospel is kind of important, don't cha know. I would love to go there, but it might take a dozen or so sermons to do it justice. Aren't you glad? Today, our topic is the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

To call the Holy Spirit the Comforter is to use just one of several possible translations of the Greek word St. John records Jesus as saying. That word is, *παράκλητος*, which can have any one of several meanings: an advocate as in a lawyer, a helper, an intercessor, a mediator, and a comforter. The roots of the word mean someone who is called to your side, to be beside you, to aid you in some way. In the KJV, it is always translated as *Comforter* in St. John's Gospel, while in the ESV, it is translated as *Helper*. It occurs only one more place in the Greek, and that is in St. John's First Epistle in Chapter 2:1 where it is translated as *advocate*. and that is the verse we hear in the reading of the Comfortable Words: 1 John 2:1-2 *if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins:*

Here is another tidbit that adds a little weight to that side of the scale. The word, *Comforter*, occurs only 7 times in the KJV of the Bible: 3 times in the OT and 4 times in the NT. The thing is that all four of those times in the NT are in the Gospel of St. John, and each of them occurs within that Maundy Thursday window. There are two mentions of "the Comforter" in Chapter 14, and one each in 15 and 16. I think we should look at each of them.

The passage that contains the two mentions of the Comforter in chapter 14 is the Gospel lesson for Pentecost. In chapter 14, not long after Jesus has said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." in John 14:6, He discusses His relationship with the Father and then begins to tell the disciples what he will do for them in verse 14:13. Then, in verse 14:16, He tells them: John 14:16-17

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

After telling the disciples a little bit about how the world will not see Him, but that they will, Jesus tells them that they will come to know that He is in the Father, that they are in Him, and He is in them. After a little more description of those who love Jesus and those who do not, in John 14:25-26 He tells them this: 25 "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Comforter, 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.

The instance of the use of Comforter/Helper in Chapter 15 is in a passage in which Jesus is saying comforting words to strengthen the faith of disciples in the face of what he knows will be violent opposition and hatred on the part of the world of unbelievers. In verses John 15:25-27 (ESV) He says: 25 But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' 26 "But when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

The last instance of "Comforter" in the KJV is in our Gospel lesson for today: John 16:7-11 7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

The main message in the beginning of this lesson is simply that unless Jesus goes away, the Comforter won't come. The next part, in verses 8-11 is a little difficult, but we need to untangle it to learn what it means because it is important. The problem with it comes from the problem of translating the Greek verb, *ἐλέγχο*, *elencho*, that is translated as *convict* in the ESV and as

*reprove* in the KJV. The word does have those meanings, but it can also mean to *refute*, to *prove that something is wrong*, which has the effect of correcting an error. Leon Morris has the most comprehensive commentary on this passage that I have seen. He first notes that this is the only passage in the entire Bible in which we are told that the Spirit will perform “a work in the [whole] world; that all the other references to the Spirit speak of what He will do in [individual] believers” He also notes that different commentators use all of these meanings for *elencho*. Rodney Whitacre quotes the German commentator Büchsel as saying that in the NT, this word, *elencho*, means, “to show someone his sin and summon him to repentance.” When all these meanings as are put together, the consensus of the commentators seems to be that the Holy Spirit is going to show the world where it is wrong about sin, about what it is and what it isn’t; about what constitutes wrong and right judgment; and that He will convict the world of its sin because of its unbelief, and anyone of those should be seen by any believer as a call to repentance.

To convict the world of righteousness has to do with showing them their error in thinking that they can do anything that is righteous, to show them and us that we cannot acquire merit by our own efforts, but that the source of all righteousness is Christ’s atoning work on the Cross. The world shall not see Christ any longer because He has ascended to the side of His Father so that knowledge of righteousness can only come to us now by and through the Holy Spirit.

The work of judgment is to convince the world that Satan was defeated by what Jesus did on the Cross. Justice has prevailed in the defeat of Satan. This judgment is not what the world thinks: namely that now the world will be judged favorably, but instead is simply the condemnation and overthrow of Satan.

All three of these “convictions” go to show that it is Jesus Christ who is the central figure in all this. as we see in the conclusion of the Lesson. Let’s look at the rest of the Gospel Lesson: John 16:12-15 <sup>12</sup>“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

There is still a lot that Jesus would like to be able to tell the disciples, but they are just not yet ready to hear it. They had been told three times by Jesus that He would be killed and would rise again, but they still did not believe it. They had no clue that He would be crucified the next day.

They needed to be taught and prepared for the job they were going to have to do in building the church after Jesus had gone back to heaven and they were left with the Holy Spirit Whom they could not see nor touch. They had to be prepared with two doses of the Holy Spirit in that upper room and then have some time to let that soak in before they would be ready for what was going to come over them on the day of Pentecost. At this point, they are probably not yet ready to understand that they are not yet ready to bear, to endure, what Jesus would like to tell them.

So then Jesus tells them what the Comforter will do for them, but now Jesus calls Him the “**Spirit of Truth**”, which He is called only 4 times in the Bible: 3 times in St. John’s Gospel and once in St. John’s First Epistle. What is important about the Spirit is that He comes not just as a “Helper” for the disciples and later for all believers; He comes for the purpose of speaking what Christ and the Father want Him to say: “**he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak**”. And what is it He hears that He will speak? The things He is told by the Father, and by Christ Jesus. The purpose and work of the Spirit is the furtherance of the Church of Christ: Morris says, “**The work of the Spirit is Christocentric.**” That should be obvious from the last two verses of the Lesson in which Jesus says of the Spirit: <sup>14</sup>**He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.** <sup>15</sup>**All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.** What Jesus says in that last sentence is almost equivalent to what he said in the next to-next to last verse of the Gospel of St. Matthew: Matthew 28:18 **18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."**

But it seems that Christ has turned over God’s work in the world to the Spirit, that member of the Trinity whom we seem to forget or ignore. We do not know how frequently God the Father interacted with the world after the Creation. It seems that often in the OT when God interacted with men in the person of a man or angel, sometimes as the Angel of the Lord who allowed Himself to be worshipped, that that “person” was a pre-Incarnational manifestation of the Son of God. But what we do know is that The Father has never allowed any person to see His face. He was always manifested as being hidden in a cloud, the Glory Cloud. Then there came the actual Incarnation, and we had Jesus on the earth for 30-some years; but then He ascended to the Father and sent us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, with whom we think we have little or no contact.

Francis Chan calls the Holy Spirit, The Forgotten God. We should not forget or ignore the Holy Spirit. Both the Father and the Son speak to us now through Him. It is the Spirit who

enters us at Baptism. It is through the Spirit that the Father draws us to faith in Christ. It is the Spirit that dwells in us as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 [19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.](#) It is the Spirit Who helps us to pray when we don't know what to say as St. Paul tells us in Romans 8:26-27 [<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.](#)

The Holy Spirit is here, now, in each of us. He is God, One of the three Persons of the Trinity; and He is as close to you as your skin or your breath. It is He Who gives us spiritual gifts. What can we say to Him other than Thank You. We can say: Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and fill our souls with holy fire.

AMEN!

Let us Pray.

O Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the Faithful, visit we pray Thee, this congregation with Thy Love and favour; come and fill our souls with Love for Thee. Make us ever aware of Thy presence in our life. Enlighten our minds more and more with the light of the everlasting Gospel. Graft in our hearts the love of truth; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and of Thy great mercy guide us on the path of truth, O blessed spirit, Whom with the Father and the Son together, we worship and glorify as one God, world without end. Amen.