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Giver and Renewer of Life

John 14:15-18, 26

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Today is Pentecost, the day the HS came upon the disciples. Our Call to Worship vividly demonstrated what happened that day – sound of a mighty wind, an appearance of what looked like fire on the disciples, and disciples speaking in other languages. We consider Pentecost the birth of the church because on that day 3000 people became followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit had everything to do with it.

The story of Pentecost is not just something we remember that happened 2000 years ago. The reality of Pentecost is that our world at this moment is God-drenched. It is filled with the Holy Spirit. However, many Christians do not understand the Holy Spirit. Who is the HS? What is the role of the HS? What does the HS do? And why do we need it?

As you know, we are in the midst of a sermon series on creeds. Our creed today is called "A Brief Statement of Faith." It was written in 1983 when the two largest Presbyterian denominations (the northern and southern) reunited. They had been separated since the Civil War. To celebrate the reunion, A Brief Statement of Faith was written. It starts out talking about Jesus, then God, and ending with the Holy Spirit. It is that part on the Holy Spirit which will be our creed today.

The Holy Spirit part of the creed begins with these words: "We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life."

When I was a young Christian, I saw the HS as something that gave my Christian walk great power or fulfillment. In other words, I equated the HS with some kind of experience...sort of like the Day of Pentecost. It was something I wanted.

In the summer after my second year of college, I traveled with a youth organization called LYE or Lutheran Youth Encounter (Remember, I grew up in Minnesota, so almost everybody was Lutheran). I traveled with 5 other young adults to various rural Lutheran churches in the Midwest to help these churches build up their youth groups.

One evening, one of the women on our team invited me to a prayer meeting she had heard about in someone's home. We met in the basement. I don't remember much of what we did that night, except at the end.

The leader said, "Let's pray for all the college students here." They told us to stand in a circle. The leader came inside the circle, laid hands over a student standing across from me and began to pray for him, calling on the HS (I don't remember the exact words). The student fell backwards into the arms of two adults. The leader went to the next young adult in the circle, and the same thing happened.

He went around the circle, getting closer and closer to me. I knew what it was happening. They called it being slain in the spirit. And, I was terrified.

What do I do? I remember turning behind me and looking at the steps leading up out of the basement. I wanted to run up those steps and get out of there. But I didn't move. Students were laying on the ground all around me as the leader approached. He placed his hands on my shoulders, prayed over me....and then pushed me! (Well, I never!) Being the shy person I am, I didn't want to make a scene, so I just fell back into the arms of a couple people standing behind me. I was completely humiliated.

Was this the work of the Holy Spirit? If it was, I wasn't so sure I wanted it anymore even though I desired fulfillment in my walk with Jesus. Is the work of the HS just an experience of something like the Day of Pentecost, or like what happened in that basement? Or, is it something more?

Let's read our scripture passage to find out what the gospel says, what Jesus said about the work of God's Spirit. Before we begin, let's pray: Holy Spirit, giver and renewer of Life, breathe a fresh filling of these words into our hearts and souls so we may serve you with great joy. Amen.

Read John 14:15-18, 26 (The Word of the Lord....)

Growing up, I was called by several different names: Diane, my good friends called me Di, my Dad called me DiDee. I also heard Dee, Chris, Christopher Columbus, and my brother always called me Sister (and still does). I am sure many of you are known by different names.

The Holy Spirit has different names, too. Here in our passage, Jesus said he will send the Holy Spirit, and he gives the HS a name. In the Greek word the word is *paraclete*. No, this does not mean a pretty bird (Parakeet). Nor, those things on the bottom of football and baseball shoes (pair of cleats). *Paraclete* means one who comes alongside.

Here in our translation, the English word given for *paraclete* is Advocate. Other translations use Helper, Counselor, Comforter. All names given to the HS.

What we read in the Gospel of John is a portion of scripture called Jesus' farewell discourse. He is preparing his disciples for his departure, in other words, his death. But Jesus is telling them that he will not leave them alone. He will not leave them orphaned. They will still have a relationship with Jesus, but not a physical one. It will be entirely different. Jesus is going to send an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, Jesus' spirit, and it will be *in* them.

While Jesus walked on earth, his ministry was limited to one locale, one person. But now Jesus' Spirit will be in them, no matter where they go, together or apart. The Holy Spirit is a way for Jesus to be with them forever. Notice Jesus said it is another advocate. The first advocate was Jesus.

This Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will do the same things that Jesus did and will remind them of the things Jesus said. The Advocate is an advocate for Jesus. So, if you want to know what the HS does, go back and read the Gospels, and notice what Jesus says and does. The Spirit does what Christ did, but will do it differently, that is, from within. I live with you now, Jesus said, but the HS will live in you, and therefore will remain with you forever.

As I mentioned earlier, the Greek word for “Advocate” is “paraclete,” which means “called to the side of.”

A couple of weeks ago, I was traveling south on Camino del Sol heading towards the church. There in the middle of the road was a gila monster. Now, a gila monster is a thick bodied large lizard with a beautiful tapestry pattern on its back. This guy looked to be a foot and half long. As cars came by, he cringed, not knowing what direction to go.

As I saw him, I yelled to no one in the car, “It’s a gila monster!” They are pretty rare, and to see one in the wild is pretty special. As I drove by him, I realized I couldn’t just leave him there. I parked my car at the side of the road, and as I ran back to him, I looked for a stick because gila monsters are poisonous. And if they latch onto you with those big jaws, they don’t let go.

I didn’t see a stick, so I stood in front of him trying to direction him to the side of the road and at the same time waving my arms slowing down traffic and trying to direct the cars around him.

Fortunately, one of the cars stopped, and a guy got out to help. At the same time, a guy on a bike came by and stopped to help. So two of us directed traffic around the gila monster, and the biker went looking for a stick.

I stood in front the gila monster, taking the cars on. I was his advocate. I came along side him to help, although he wasn’t too happy about my helping. I looked down at him between the cars, and he was eyeing my ankle, hissing up a storm!

Eventually, the biker found a large stick and we were able to get the gila monster to the side of road, and left him hiding in a bush. As I left, I gave the gila monster my final directions as his advocate to not go on the road again.

We all have times when we need that person or persons by our side, the one who will advocate for us. When you have hard times in your life, it is good to have someone with you, someone by your side. Or, when you face a momentous decision, you don’t want to think it through alone. You want input from other people as you go about

making this decision. So you will call someone to be by your side to talk through the options.

That is what the word, “paraclete,” means: to call someone to be at your side, to give you strength and wisdom and guidance and help. This is what the Holy Spirit does as we follow Christ. The HS brings to mind what Jesus said and did, so you will be given strength and new resources and new insights. This Advocate stands up for you, leads you, takes your side and won’t leave you.

Every Sunday before the worship service starts, we three pastors pray along with the liturgist, and we pray with the choir as well. We ask the HS come along side us: to bless this time, to anoint it, guide us and direct us. We ask the HS to use the songs of the choir and the words of the sermon to enter into your hearts and souls, so you will go out with great joy and be lights to all that you meet. Because remember, the Holy Spirit is the advocate for Jesus. The Spirit of Truth points to the One who said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”, and uses us to point to Christ.

When I sit down to write a sermon, it is a time of fear and trembling to speak God’s words. So days before the sermon, I ask the HS to come along side and show the way. As I study the scriptures, I ask the HS to speak through the holy words. As I sit down to write, I ask the HS to guide the message. And just before we speak God’s words, we pray asking for the HS to be in this time and point to Christ.

Your leaders, staff and lay leaders pray as often as we can, asking the HS to come along side to guide us in our decisions and lead this church into the future. On the day that the HS breathed new life into the disciples, the HS breathes new life into us as individuals and as a church. Everything we do for the Kingdom of God must be done by the power of the Spirit working in us and through us so we may be lights to our community.

Come alongside us, O Holy Spirit, our Counselor, Advocate, Teacher, Helper, Comforter. Jesus has not left us to figure this out on our own (although sometimes we act like it!). All we need to do is open ourselves to the presence of the life-giving Spirit, praying for the breath of God to create in us something new.

Remember at the beginning of this message, I told you about that rather frightening experience of being with the very enthusiastic prayer group. I don't want you to misunderstand...many Christians experience the HS in such ways. For many, these are important in their walk with Jesus. But these things are not necessary to see the working of the HS.

Remember, Jesus said he is sending another Advocate. The first Advocate was Jesus. The Holy Spirit is an advocate that looks a whole lot like Jesus. Which means that we've actually seen the Spirit lots of times...when people act like Jesus. Anytime someone stands up for another... anytime someone prays for healing... anytime someone forgives...anytime someone prays for their enemies...anytime someone reaches out to the poor and outcast...anytime someone acts like Jesus, you are experiencing the Holy Spirit.

It all goes back to the very first sentence of Jesus' teaching on the HS: "If you love me, obey my commandments." And what is the commandment? To love one another as Christ has loved us. When we obey this commandment we demonstrate the Holy Spirit working in us.

So we look at the name of the Holy Spirit: Paraclete - just one word, but so many possibilities:

Helper, the Spirit empowers us as the body of Christ to serve and care for our neighbor.

Comforter, the Spirit comes alongside us, bringing hope to the hopeless and comfort to the grieving and suffering in our midst.

Advocate, the Spirit gives witness to Jesus as we serve.

Counselor, the Spirit offers guidance and direction.

Someone once asked a professor named Martin Marty: "Can you define the 'Holy Spirit?'"

He said "No. You cannot bound, end or limit God — especially the God we know as the Spirit ... there are no limits, no ends to what God would work now through us.

"So we do not define. Rather, we pray: 'Come, Holy Spirit!'"

Gracious God, we pray for a fresh filling of your Holy Spirit – your very presence in our hearts. We ask for your love, your strength, your promise of new beginnings. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

I now invite you to take your bulletins, turn to “A Brief Statement of Faith” listed in the worship order after the sermon. Please stand as we state together as a community of believers what we believe about the HS....

We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life...

In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”