

June 8, 2025

“The Gift of the Advocate”

John 14:8-17, (25-27)

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Let us pray:

God, in the Spirit of Truth you have given us the gift of your Spirit Advocate. May we celebrate with solace and be shaped into agents of liberation. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, oh, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

A recent criminal incident near Boston, Massachusetts involved four youth painting offensive graffiti, including a swastika and drug references, on a public building. The local press learned about the incident, and it appeared in the paper. Given the young ages of the boys, and the potential for the controversy to be inflamed, the police were eager for options. They wanted a response that would underscore how serious this crime was, and they also wanted to allay fears among Jewish community members who may worry about a sleeper cell of neo-Nazis in town.

The police referred the case to a restorative justice agency. Multiple circles of listening were established for these youth. One included in a member of a local synagogue who spoke about the meaning of the swastika symbol and related that many had relatives who had died in the Holocaust. In one meeting, a powerful lesson was taught on the function of a “look-out” when the Jewish representative pointed to thousands who knew about the

Holocaust but tragically failed to raise alarm. By the end of each meeting, the group had worked towards a plan of repair. That plan included landscaping at the synagogue alongside congregants, visiting the Holocaust memorial in Boston, community service at a Jewish retirement home, restoring public park benches defaced by other youth, and developing face-saving lines for the youth to use to prevent harm in the future, like (e.g., “I can’t do this. I’m meeting my brother for basketball.” Or “Hey, this is boring. Let’s go play video games.”). Later, one youth even secured a summer job at his community service site. Another youth continued to volunteer hours well beyond the requirements contained in the plan of repair.

Real boys — with a desire to belong, to make an impact in the world — caused this harm. And real victims — people who had lost loved ones under this symbol — were affected by that harm. Now the crime “had a face,” both on the offender side and the victim side. Without a restorative justice option, the police would have had to arrest the boys, and they would have appeared before a judge who may have imposed a sentence.

Afterwards, one boy said, “I learned that it’s never too late to do the right thing.” A Jewish community member said, “This young man could have acted just to make us happy. That would have been a waste of time for all of us. Instead, he showed real maturity, insight, and a desire to learn how his mistake had hurt us. What a great process.” The police officer said, “Now, when I see these boys around town, I won’t see kids who messed up. I’ll see them for everything they did to make right.”

- <https://www.c4rj.org/about-us/c4rj-case-stories>

The work of restorative justice initiatives offers collaborative opportunities to repair wrongdoing. The principle aims to make REAL the lives of victims and perpetrators in an effort to advocate for greater mutual freedom and fuller communal accountability.

In speaking about restorative justice, Activist and author Shane Claiborn says:

Grace makes room... for justice that is restorative and dedicated to healing the wounds of injustice. It is not always easy to believe that love is more powerful than hatred, life more powerful than death, and that people can be better than the worst thing they have done.

There are many versions of justice competing for our allegiance. Some leads to death. Others lead to life, and to redemption, and to healing. And at first glance our scripture also contains two competing versions of the Holy Spirit: Spirit of Truth and Advocate.

We also learn about the relation between Christ's person and his works, the authority of the ascended Christ at work in the church, the nature of Christ's coming again, and the power of prayer.

And clearly, one theme ties them all together- the presence of the Holy Spirit advocating for Christ's Holy Church.

Verse sixteen we learn there is "another Paraclete" with Jesus himself being the first one who has come on our behalf. Jesus then calls this second paraclete, the Spirit of Truth which will be with us forever. Jesus assures his disciples that the Father will send the Paraclete in his name. And that the Holy Spirit will teach us The Way and The Truth and The Life of Jesus Christ.

One theologian comments that the Spirit:

....serves a particular purpose, namely, to remind the disciples of all that Jesus taught them and to explain to them the meaning of all that Jesus has said and done. However, the paraclete does not teach new truths or do things clearly different from the sorts of things Jesus has done. The presence of the Paraclete brings Jesus to mind..... the Spirit always bears witness to Jesus, who is the truth. – Phillip Turner

I wonder, does remedial tutor who us making old things new and re-casting time-worn truths into wind caressed, fire-born tongues fit what you expect of the Holy Spirit?

Well, there has been a lot of scholarly debate of the meaning of the Greek word “parakeltos”. It is general agreed the most accurate definition is “advocate” because Jesus places his dialogue a forensic setting. As with the centuries of Jewish tradition before him, Jesus fashioned this situation in terms of a divine court with God as the judge of a crime. Jesus assumed that his disciples would find themselves on the wrong side of the law-targets of official persecution. So, in this case the Advocate acts on behalf of the accused, which is the “church” to which Jesus was speaking. And it is clear then, that unlike in the courts of humankind, in God’s court, people can trust that their case will be completely heard through pleading of the Advocate, God will be reminded of their plight.

In our scripture, the only accuser that John names, is “The World”. While somewhat elusive and mysterious, today the words “The World” are plenty enough to illicit advocacy for those seeking to live the odd life of service,

compassion, inclusion, and social and environmental justice- known as Christianity. These words offer hope, for all of us, who are in need of an Advocate perhaps for our sins of omission, the violence of our privilege, or crimes of our nation.

Yes “The World” does need and advocate, one that I dedicated to healing the wounds of injustice, whose law is grace and has the faith and wisdom to leads us to life, to redemption, and to healing.

One commentator notes that in recent years that the day of Pentecost has been re-discovered as a source of political witness, even though many think it curious or weird, but he says

It is liturgically fitting and theologically to the point. Pentecost signifies freedom. Freedom now. Public freedom. Freedom from fear.

– Bill Wylie Kellerman. *Seasons of Faith and Conscience: Kairos, Confession, Liturgy.*

Today we celebrate the gift of the Spirit, which makes the old things of Christ new, and through whom we are connected to undying life of The One whom God sent on our behalf. Today we have unshakable confidence in the Advocate who has been sent to champion the cause of Christ’s church communities. Today we learn it’s never too late, or impossible, to do the right thing.

Pentecost teaches us to say no to many of judgements and ruling of this world: to say no to retributive punitive justice, no to the dehumanization of anyone be it victim or perpetrator, no to the plundering of creation for selfish gain, no to the embrace of death and violence.

At the same time Pentecost teaches us to say yes to the judgments and rulings of God's divine kingdom: to say yes to hope, yes to a plan for repair, yes to being champions of Christ's fragile and enduring community.

Scholarly debates and allegiances aside- our Parakleytos, our unfailing look-out, is speaking grace through wind and fire breath and flame, insuring God hears our plight and won't just see us as messed up people but will see us for all we are and all we can become. We are judged, we are loved, we are welcomed, and we can walk- free.

Mysteriously and daringly- Acquitted with true freedom.

All because of our true Advocate, our Advocate of Grace.

Amen.