

A Storytelling Commentary on John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

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This is the part of Jesus' last discourse with the disciples for Pentecost. It is about the gift of the Holy Spirit and the character of the Holy Spirit. The context of this speech is that in the Gospel of John, the audience, beginning in chapter 13, is addressed as disciples. This scripture is part of that concluding discourse that goes on for 20 to 25 minutes. It is the most intimate time in the whole of the Gospel tradition between Jesus and the listeners and God. It is an effort to bring all of those together.

The translation of the name *Paraclete* as "Advocate" (NRSV) is okay. An advocate is a lawyer in a trial situation. Paraclete is also the "Comforter" bringing the comfort of God. It is also the "Holy Spirit" who has this specific name of the Advocate or the Paraclete with all of these various meanings. That's one of the things you might want to explore in learning and telling this passage. Paraclete is a very powerful and affectionate term that has more content than "Holy Spirit."

You can see why the dispute that emerged some 1,000 years later, which was one of the principle reasons for the division between the Eastern and Western church, was the controversy over whether the Holy Spirit comes directly from the Father or whether it comes from the Father and the Son. The Western Church added "and the Son" which absolutely scandalized the Eastern Church. You can see in this discourse why both of them are right. Jesus specifically says, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth which comes from the Father," he specifically says, "from the Father."

But at other places scripture says that the Spirit will come from the Father and the Son: "The Spirit of Truth will guide you and he will say to you what he has received from me. He will take what is mine and declare to you..." It's as if the Spirit is taking this from Jesus and passing it on. The most important bit is that he says that the Holy Spirit will not come until he has gone which means that the Holy Spirit comes after Jesus. This is only to say that both the East and the West were right and the problem is that they had to choose one or the other. It is a very unfortunate thing that has happened around the doctrinal disputes in the church. It is an ambiguity, which John would never have imagined would become problematic.

This part of Jesus' discourse has as its purpose preparation for what is coming in the future. He is preparing the disciples for the trials and tribulations that they will face. He is introducing them to the Holy Spirit that will be with them and will give them power and energy, wisdom, and the access to truth that they will need. The work of the Spirit is described in this discourse.

What is it that the Spirit does? Well, specifically the Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. What does this mean? It is about sin because they do not believe in Jesus. That is, the Spirit will prove them wrong in their judgment that Jesus was not the Messiah. Jesus' way is a way of non-violence and peace but the world has chosen war as the way of solving conflicts.

It is also about righteousness, "because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer." That is, righteousness is the recognition that Jesus was right and that following his way leads to rightness for those who follow him and believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that any judgment that righteousness is not the way of Jesus is wrong. The sign of this is that Jesus is going to the Father. That is only possible if what he taught was right.

It is about judgment. Judgment is that Jesus is established as the ruler of the cosmos. That means that the ruler of the world, the evil one, the powers of evil in the world, the powers of sin, violence, hatred and division—those powers are condemned. They are shown to have been wrong and are subject to judgment.

Jesus' prayer that he is going away and that the Spirit will follow him is simply recognition in the story about the power of Jesus' presence and that the Spirit will then continue Jesus' spirit in the world. He will go away, but his spirit will be present because the Holy Spirit will come. Part of the continuation of his spirit is that Jesus will be glorified. The Spirit will glorify Jesus by making his way a way of glory rather than shame and humiliation. That is the paradox that runs through the whole Gospel of John: Jesus being lifted up on the cross, the most shameful death, was his way of being glorified.

Part of the glorification of Jesus is the ongoing education of Jesus' followers, his disciples. That's why John is taking Jesus' words and declaring them in the ongoing life of the community, and in the ongoing experience of Jesus' words as they are recited and repeated by heart by those who believe in him and internalize his words and pass them on. A central dimension of the action of the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit makes possible the repetition and reliving of Jesus' words.

In doing this telling of Jesus' words, getting them into your heart and telling them by heart, you are participating in the action of the Holy Spirit. There is direct connection and continuity between what you are doing and what Jesus is talking about in this teaching to his disciples. So also, in your advocacy of this for those who are listening to you, the Spirit is speaking through you to encourage that kind of intimacy and relationship and knowledge of truth in Jesus' words.