

The Nature of God: “With Us”

Last week we saw how God is presented in the Old Testament, as one God in some kind of plural form. He is described by the plural form of Elohim, the word usually translated God and He talks about Himself as “us”, “Let us make people in our image”. And we saw how He presents Himself as a Spirit, as a Servant and as a King. And then we took a quick look at Jesus being accused of blasphemy, both for forgiving sins, which is something only God can do, and for claiming that He would soon be seated at the right hand of the throne of God, which would place Him on equal footing with the Divine. We know that this was the charge that was used to justify His execution by crucifixion; it wasn’t something He said lightly or by mistake.

This week we’re going to look at Jesus’ teaching again - this time from His Passover evening talk to His disciples on the night before that crucifixion. The narrative comes to us from John chapters 13-17, but we will focus in on two chapters; 14 and 16.

Just before we start on John, I want to read a verse from Luke’s account, which shows us Jesus’ heart as He prepares for this last Passover meal with His disciples:

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. (Luke 22:15f)

So this gathering in Jerusalem with Jesus and his twelve disciples to celebrate the Passover was a precious time for Jesus, something He had eagerly looked forward to. And as the evening progresses, Jesus says and does some very significant things. He washes the disciples’ feet, showing them that leadership is servanthood. He gives them a new commandment: love one another in the same way I have loved you. He dialogues with them about going away and He uses the language of the bridegroom to describe what He will soon be doing - “In my Father’s house are many rooms ... I go to prepare a place for you ... I will return and take you to be with Me where I am.” (14:2,3) We touched on that last week as we celebrated communion together - and were reminded again that we are the bride pledged to Jesus and He will come again to take us to Himself, so that we can be with Him.

But a little later on in the evening, Jesus surprises His disciples by making a shocking statement to them. He says, in 16:7, that it is for their good that He is going away. Can you imagine how they might have felt when He said that? “Are you kidding me? How can it be good for us if You leave us now? How can we carry on this work that You’ve started without You being here to guide us, correct us? This is crazy talk - You must know that we’re not ready to take over from You, Jesus. And what about all the plans and promises about the Kingdom that was supposed to be coming? Surely You don’t expect us to bring about a new Kingdom without You being here!”

But none of those thoughts are expressed in our passage; in fact, very little of what the disciples had to say is recorded. This evening that Jesus so earnestly desired to share with His disciples is focused on Him, His final preparations of His closest followers

before He will be taken from them. And central to these preparations is this teaching from John 16:5-7:

But now I am going away to the One who sent Me, and none of you has asked Me where I am going. Instead, you are very sad. But it is actually best for you if I go away, because, if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, He will come, because I will send Him to you.

This word that is translated here as “Counselor” is the Greek word *paraclete*, which has a broad meaning that includes things like “counselor”, “comforter”, “advocate”, “helper”, “intercessor”, “mediator” and “helper”. To make sure no one misunderstands, I’ll tell you the story of an elderly woman who was having some difficulties in hearing things clearly. She once complained to her pastor that she was confused by this new term for the Holy Spirit; she had thought of Him being represented by a dove, but never as a parakeet. So, to be perfectly clear, the word is not “parakeet” but “paraclete”. And its root meaning is the one who is called alongside, the one who is summoned when help is needed. Jesus is telling His disciples that it will be better for them if he goes away, because once He is gone, He can send the paraclete to them, the one a person needs when he or she is in trouble. And they will call on the paraclete, and He will intercede for them, counsel them, comfort them, help them, be their advocate. Those are the descriptions Jesus gives us of the work of the Holy Spirit.

What Jesus is doing is shifting the world view of His closest friends and followers. He’s preparing them to live in a different world, a world that is not lived just in response to the visible realm, but also to the invisible realm. He is preparing them to live in a new way, a way that will be characterized by His physical absence, but at the same time by the real presence of the paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

Another thing we should note about what Jesus says to His disciples here is that, if He goes, He will send *another* paraclete. The Greek word for “another” indicates that He will be sending another “of the same kind”. The Holy Spirit will be operating in the same way that Jesus did, so that, even though He is not visible to them, He is very familiar because He continues the work of Jesus among them. When Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, He is not sending something or someone who will seem weird, seem unfamiliar. The Spirit is another of the same kind and will simply continue to be in their lives like Jesus was in their lives and will be doing the same kinds of works and saying the same kinds of things that Jesus had done and said.

Let’s look now at four passages where Jesus tells His disciples what the paraclete will do for them; in other words, why it’s better for them that Jesus leaves them and the paraclete comes to them:

When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth ... He will bring Me glory by revealing to you whatever He receives from Me. All that the Father has is Mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever He receives from Me. (John 16:12,13a,14,15)

Two things from this passage:

1. The paraclete is called “The Spirit of Truth” who will guide the disciples into all truth. They will miss Jesus’ physical presence, but they will be guided in the same way He has guided them - into the truth.
2. The second part of this is the process of revelation that the Spirit will follow. He will take what the Father has given to Jesus, whatever revelation is being given for the current situation or need, and He will reveal it to Jesus’ followers, opening their understanding to the truth about their situation and how they should be responding to it. He says that the paraclete doing this brings glory to Him - how does that work? The Holy Spirit is preoccupied with revealing Jesus to the world around us, but even more so, He is preoccupied with revealing Jesus to us. As we receive this revelation of the truth of Jesus from the paraclete, we too become more and more preoccupied with Jesus. This fascination with Jesus gives us a desire to get to know Him better, strengthens our faith so that we trust Him more and gives us an enthusiasm about who He is and what He has done that inspires us to tell others our experience of relationship with Him. And all of that works to bring Him more and more glory. It strengthens His reputation because we are more vocal about what He means in our lives.

Back in John 14, we read of another aspect of how the paraclete, the Holy Spirit, comes alongside followers of Jesus to guide us into all truth (v.26):

When the Father sends the Paraclete as My representative - and by the Paraclete, I mean the Holy Spirit - He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I Myself have told you.

This was an oral culture. Peter, James and John didn’t make notes of what Jesus was saying and doing every day. They didn’t have a journal or a notebook - paper hadn’t been invented yet. So it was important that they somehow remember the things Jesus had done so that they could later tell the world. They would, of course, remember many things; so dynamic and exciting was the life of following Jesus of Nazareth. But when it came time to write a lasting record of the things He had said and done, they would need some help. That help came from the Paraclete as He would teach them and remind them of all that Jesus had earlier taught them. Why do we believe the four gospels, and the portrayal of the ministry of Jesus over a period of up to three years? There are many reasons, including internal consistency, historical accuracy, the dynamic changes that took place in the lives of each of the disciples following the coming of the Spirit. But behind all of these other reasons is the faith that recognizes the work of the Paraclete in bringing things to remembrance as the disciples wrote their gospels. It is the work of the Spirit, reminding Jesus’ followers of everything He had told them, that produced all those other aspects that I just mentioned.

So, let’s stop and take a look at where we are. We have seen that the Paraclete, or “the Spirit of Truth”, guides the followers of Jesus into all truth, and that He does so by revealing the truth that is needed at the moment and by reminding us of the truths that Jesus taught while on this earth. Let’s look now at two more ways in which the Spirit of Truth, brings truth to us:

There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. (16:12)

Jesus had been teaching His disciples about the life that they would soon enter into, the life without His visible presence, the one filled and guided and inspired by the presence of the paraclete. He had so much more that He wished He could say to prepare them for this new way of living that was just ahead, but He realized that they couldn't handle it all right now, that they would miss something essential if He tried to tell them everything. So, He just told them that the paraclete would teach them the rest - the next verse is where He says that the Spirit of Truth would come and would guide them into all truth. So the message for Jesus' followers is that the ministry of the Holy Spirit will include teaching. Jesus had revealed truth to them, had reminded them of many things He had told them earlier, and had constantly been their teacher - now the Paraclete would come and would take over each of those roles ... revealing, reminding, teaching. And one more, in verse 13:

He will tell you about the future.

In the NIV, that phrase reads:

He will tell you what is yet to come.

The Spirit will disclose to Jesus' followers things they need to know about current situations, but also about ones they haven't faced yet! The paraclete will guide the infant church through the turbulent years of Roman and Jewish persecution that lie ahead because He knows what they will bring. The paraclete will nudge them out of Jerusalem and into the world with the message of the Gospel. The paraclete will give them the vision for writing out the accounts of Jesus' life that we have today in the form of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And the paraclete will give the church a vision of the ultimate future, the future in which Jesus returns and claims His bride, His church. And that future is revealed to us in the final pages of the book of Revelation, when the Spirit, the paraclete, and the bride, the church, are united in their longing to see Jesus come: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" and later, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" This is the longing of all creation, the hope of the ages, the deep desire in the heart of God - that Jesus would come to receive those who have pledged themselves to Him, forever.

That was a fairly lengthy introduction to our topic for today, but I think it was necessary and the rest of it won't take too long. Last week's sermon topic was "The Nature of God: 'Us'" and in it we looked at how God reveals Himself as "Us", as plural, as being in a relation-ship within Himself. This week's topic is, "The Nature of God: 'With us'" and I want to build on this understanding of the Paraclete, this "another Paraclete of the same kind", and look at how He is revealed as the presence of both Jesus and God the Father in this farewell teaching passage in John.

Let's look quickly at two texts which will explain the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in just a few moments:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive Him, because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him.

But you do, because He lives with you and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans - I will come to you. In just a little while the world will not see Me again, but you will. For I will live again - and you will, too. When I am

raised to life again, you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. (14:15-20)

Quick points: the Holy Spirit is with the disciples right at that moment ... who is with the disciples right at that moment? Jesus is ... and later He will be in them. So, as Jesus is present with the disciples, the Spirit will be present IN the disciples.

Right after saying this, Jesus adds this important statement: "I will not abandon you as orphans - I will come to you." Who is coming to guide the disciples into all truth, to give them revelation about the future, to remind them about Jesus, to be their teacher? The Paraclete, or the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says, "I will not abandon you as orphans - I will come to you." Jesus will be present in the hearts of the disciples by the Holy Spirit.

Here's another passage, just a few verses later:

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to Him, "Lord, why are you going to reveal Yourself only to us and not to the world at large?"

Jesus replied, "All those who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. (14:22,23)

We, Father and Son, will make our home with you, will never leave you or forsake you. God is with us, in ways we can't imagine or fully appreciate. He reveals Himself in three ways, as eternal Father, as obedient Son and as *paracletos*, the indwelling, comforting, counseling, helping, advocating Holy Spirit.

By the way, this is the same chapter in which Jesus had this exchange with Philip:

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied."

Jesus said, "Philip, don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father!" (vv.8,9)

And in the next chapter, we read this:

I will send you the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about Me. (15:26)

He doesn't come to tell us all about angels or demons or the rulers of this world or the winning numbers on the next lottery ticket. The Paraclete has a singular purpose and that is to reveal Jesus to us, to be with us as the very presence of God the Father and God the Son. Jesus hasn't left us as orphans, but has come to us through the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.

Applications:

1. Never think, never believe the lie, that you are alone. Jesus said He would not abandon us, that He would be with us always, to the end of the age, and He is a promise keeper. No matter what you are going through in your life, He is with you. Draw on that strength, that hope, that encouragement. Feed your thoughts by remembering that He is always present. Don't focus on people who have let you

down, but on the One who can lift you up ... and who wants to do that on a daily basis.

2. The word "paraclete" is rich in meaning. You can go to Google, type in "paraclete" and find a whole bunch of references - about a million - to this word. In Christian thought, it always signifies the Holy Spirit, but the core meaning of the word itself, is simply, "called to one's side". Application number two is to study what the paraclete does, what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is, and a good place to start is in John's Gospel, chapters 13-16, where Jesus teaches very directly about the promise of the Holy Spirit.
3. Third and final application for today: the paraclete wants us to call on Him, to ask for His help, to reveal Jesus to us, to lead us into all truth, to teach us, to remind us -- all the things we've looked at today. So, do what He wants - call on Him and learn from Him. Ask Him for the things that Jesus promised - what a great place to start. And then trust that He is leading you, that He is faithful to the promises that Jesus made. The Paraclete is all about honoring Jesus and I think you'll find that He honors the promises that Jesus made about His ministry in our lives.