

## **The Perfect Helper**

**John 14:15-26**

*Bryn MacPhail / Mar. 13, 2011*

Have you ever found yourself “in over your head”?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were utterly convinced of your inability to do something?

In my life, the examples where this has been the case have been numerous.

One example I can give you is from a couple of years ago when I decided to build a wooden deck for my cottage, which is north of Kingston, Ontario.

I had participated in deck-building in the past and understood, for the most part, what was required. What I doubted, however, was that I could adequately build the deck on my own.

This deck needed to be safe for children and it needed to meet the decorative expectations of wife. To this end, I resolved to get help.

I enlisted the help of a friend, an engineer, who was experienced in building stable foundations and had helped me build decks in the past.

Before engaging in any part of the work, I made sure that my friend was nearby to keep me from making any critical errors.

I could not have built this deck properly if I had been left alone. And my confidence in doing the work was entirely bound up in the accompanying presence of my friend.

I share this illustration with you because in the text before us this morning, Jesus is addressing the anxiety His disciples were feeling as they anticipated carrying on the ministry without the accompanying presence of Jesus.

The opening words of this chapter mark Jesus' desire to encourage them, "**Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me**" (14:1).

From this statement we learn at least two things. First of all, we learn that *followers of Jesus are not immune from having troubled hearts*.

Our tendency, if we lack someone alongside us, is to *fret*. If no one is looking out for our well-being, our temptation is to be *fearful*.

The second thing we learn from Jesus in this verse is that *the antidote for our troubled hearts is bound up in our relationship to Jesus Christ*.

While we concede that anxiety may befall a Christian, I submit to you that *anxiety need not master the Christian*.

Anxiety need not be the constant companion of the Christian. **“Let not your hearts be troubled”** Jesus says, **“believe in God, believe also in Me.”**

I do not think Jesus would lob empty consolations to His disciples if there were no real cure for their troubled hearts.

This is no mere pep talk. *Jesus insists that He has an adequate antidote for our anxiety and so He calls us to believe in Him.*

For those who believe in Him, Jesus promises to send **“another Helper”**. This **“Helper”** is identified a little further on as the Holy Spirit (14:17, 26).

On one level the Holy Spirit is not unfamiliar to us. We were taught very early on in our Christian journey that God exists in three ‘persons’: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Whenever we recite the Apostles’ Creed we confess, “I believe in the Holy Ghost”.

And yet, while the Christian Church formally acknowledges the existence of the Holy Spirit, I am inclined to agree with the assessment of the Anglican theologian, J.I. Packer who asserts, “the average Christian is in a complete fog as to what work the Holy Spirit does.”

Thankfully, the manner in which Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit tells us a great deal about His purpose for our lives.

Firstly, the terminology Jesus employs describes the function of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word used here is “Parakletos”—“para” means “alongside of”, and “kletos” means “called”.

Taken together the Holy Spirit is described by Jesus as “one who is called alongside of”.

The King James Version rendering of “Parakletos” as “**Comforter**” is also helpful. Based on the Latin words, “cum”—meaning “with”, and “fortis”—meaning “fortify”, a comforter is one who is with you in order to strengthen you.

Surely, this is why the apostle Paul could say, “**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me**” (Phil. 4:13).

For Paul, the Holy Spirit was not some vague manifestation of Divine presence. Paul’s experience of the Holy Spirit’s power matched the description given by Jesus.

And Paul understood that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to assist and support our efforts to serve Him.

So the first thing we learn about The Holy Spirit is that *He comes alongside us to strengthen us.*

The second thing we learn about the Holy Spirit is that *He is always with the Christian*.

Jesus says that when the Spirit is given, “**He will be with (us) forever**” (14:16). And, a few verses later, Jesus says, “**I will not leave you**” (14:18).

Commenting on this verse, Charles Spurgeon writes, “It is a delightful truth that the Spirit of God always dwells in believers; — not, sometimes, but *always*. . . At no single moment is the Spirit of God gone from a believer.”

And notice to whom this statement is addressed: ‘Peter, even though you will soon deny Me, I will not leave you. Thomas, though you will soon doubt Me, I will not depart from you.’

If the Spirit’s presence in our life was conditional upon our achievement of a certain level of faithfulness, we might have reason to continue with our anxiety.

Thankfully, the contrary is true—in spite of our vacillating commitment to Jesus, in spite of our lingering doubts about what He is capable of, Jesus says to all of His followers, “**I will not leave you.**”

The Holy Spirit is said to always be indwelling the follower of Jesus.

On one level, this is difficult to describe. How do I explain what it feels like to have the Spirit of Christ living within me?

Mere words do not suffice here. Perhaps this is why Jesus says that **“the world does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you”** (14:17).

I hear Jesus saying that one cannot be adequately acquainted with the Holy Spirit through instruction alone.

A person comes to know the Holy Spirit by the experience of the Spirit abiding in him or her.

Again, this is difficult to describe, but hopefully many of you know what I am talking about.

You have likely felt the Spirit’s powerful presence of particular occasions. During your prayer time, while reading your Bible, while sharing your faith with an unbeliever, or while sitting in a pew (perhaps here at the Kirk) listening to the Word proclaimed.

I’m not speaking of some ‘warm and fuzzy’ feeling we get, but rather, I’m speaking of an experience where you feel a powerful connection to God—a time when you feel a powerful inclination to do His will.

This leads me to the third thing we learn about the Holy Spirit’s function: It is a primary role of the Holy Spirit to *assist the Christian in conforming to God’s will*.

The difference between an experience of mere sentiment and a genuine experience of the Holy Spirit is this: an experience of mere sentiment will not change you.

There may be occasions when we feel a powerful emotional stirring; we may feel a chill run down our spine; we may even be moved to tears—but this is *no proof* of the Holy Spirit's work.

*The evidence of the Spirit's work will manifest itself in a strong inclination to do the will of God.*

Moreover, this strong inclination from the Spirit will inevitably translate into a behaviour that demonstrates an increasing conformity to the will of God.

After telling His disciples that He would come to them through the Holy Spirit, Jesus goes on at length to talk about the importance of obeying His commandments. And so, naturally, we make a connection between the two.

Jesus gives His Spirit not simply to make us feel good—although, yes, the Holy Spirit does indeed make us feel good!

*Jesus gives us His Spirit in order to strengthen us and to incline us to do His will.*

Jesus says, **“In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you”** (14:20).

Jesus goes on, “**He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me**” (14:21).

Let’s take a moment to think about a few of these commands.

A chapter earlier in John, Jesus washes the feet of His disciples and says to them, “**I have a new commandment for you...As I have loved you, so you must love one another**” (13:34).

Here, Jesus presents *a manner of loving* that exceeds our own. Jesus would not simply have us love according to our own inclinations, but He says that we need to love as He loves.

How does Jesus love? Jesus says that it is not enough to merely love those who are kind to us; Jesus insists that we also must love our enemies (Lk. 6:32-35).

Some of you may have difficulty imagining “**enemies**”, but undoubtedly you have individuals in your life that you struggle to get along with. Undoubtedly, there are people in your life that are difficult to love.

How do we remedy this? How do we truly and sincerely love those who have hurt us, betrayed us, offended us, annoyed us, or ignored us?

Humanly speaking, it is not natural to love your enemies. It is not easy to love those who have hurt us. And yet, this is what Jesus commands.



And, if you look at many of the other commandments of Jesus, you will see that they are no less difficult.

Remember in Luke when Jesus says, **“If anyone wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily”** (Lk. 9:23).

Does that come naturally to you? I certainly do not wake up in the morning thinking about how I am going to deny myself!

My default is not to think of ways to on set aside my comfort in order to take up my cross.

Nor are my enemies at the top of my prayer list. And yet, Jesus presents these things as non-negotiable commandments.

What hope is there for our obedience?

Our hope is bound up in *our Helper*.

There is much we cannot do. We cannot be like Jesus by our own strength. We cannot obey His will through our own efforts.

Jesus knows this, and so He provides His people with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes alongside us and strengthens us, and compels us, to do the will of Christ. The Spirit assists us in doing things that would otherwise be impossible for us.

This is why God's people need always be guarded in speaking about what we can and cannot do.

We are not like those who live apart from Christ. We are not like those who are unable to behold the Spirit of Christ. We are different.

***We can do all things through Him who strengthens us*** (Phil. 4:13).

Even if we lack assistance from human beings, we do not lack where it matters most.

Jesus has provided us with the greatest companion in the Universe—He has given us His Spirit.

And so when you find yourself in need—when you find yourself “in over your head”—remember that you are not alone.

Think about what God requires from you.

Think about what this congregation needs from you.

Think about the mission that has been entrusted to us.

Let not your heart be troubled. We have a Perfect Helper nearby.

***We can do all things through Him who strengthens us*** (Phil. 4:13).