

The Helper

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said to his disciples, “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** Here ends our text.

Wouldn't Christianity be so much easier if Jesus would just manifest himself to our world in the same way that he manifested himself to his twelve disciples? We could simply put Jesus on exhibit at the Smithsonian. For all the people who need to see to believe, we could simply say, “Come here and put your fingers into the scars of his hands and feet. Put your hand into his side. See, Jesus is a real man who was crucified. But he's also God in that he's risen from the dead and still living 2,000 years later.” Then Jesus could give a 45-minute presentation and do all the talking himself about the Triune God and his salvation. Perhaps he could demonstrate his power with a few miracles. Wouldn't people be able, then, to just decide for themselves whether to believe or not after seeing all the evidence? Of course, this would cause some logistical problems. The lines would be too long for everyone to see him, and even when they did, it would be for only a brief moment. Jesus would also have to go on tour to every nation of the world so everyone might have a chance to see him and hear him speak. But it sure would take the burden off us if Jesus would just manifest himself to our world today like he did when he walked bodily on this earth.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus has just told his disciples that he would soon be going to his Father in heaven. He would be leaving them. He would leave them physically for a short while when he was crucified, died, and was buried. But he would be leaving them physically for a long while after he had risen and ascended into heaven. While he was with them, he had manifested himself to them and the world. But now that he was leaving, he would continue to manifest himself only to them but no longer to the world.

Of course, this brings up a problem in the disciples' minds. One of the disciples named Judas, not the one who betrayed Jesus but the one also known as Thaddeus, asks Jesus, **“Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?”** For these past three years, Jesus had been doing all the talking, the preaching and teaching, the serving and ministry. He had manifested himself to his disciples and the world. But once he left, how was he going to continue to manifest himself to his disciples? And after he was gone, who would manifest the true God to the world if it wasn't Jesus? The disciples are perplexed.

Jesus answers Thaddeus' first question. How will he continue to manifest himself to them and future disciples? It would be through his Word. He was leaving his Word with them. All those years the disciples had heard the words of Jesus. As long as they had his word, Jesus was still with them and manifesting himself to them. In fact, for all who kept his word, Jesus said that he and his Father would come and dwell with them. Jesus told them, **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** Instead of dwelling with his church like he did as a pillar of cloud in the Tabernacle, or dwelling with his church as he did in his physical body while he walked this earth, Jesus and his Father would now dwell in the members of the body of believers who kept his Word, who believed his Word and practiced it.

Of course this may have set off a little panic among the disciples. Could they remember all of Jesus' words? Had anyone been taking notes? What if they forgot some of his words or remembered them wrong? No one told them they'd have to memorize these things for the test. How were they to keep Jesus' Words if they didn't have a good record or perfect memory of what he said?

But Jesus consoles them. He tells them that he and the Father are sending them help. Jesus said, **“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit would proceed from the Father and the Son. He'd come and help the disciples after Jesus ascended to his Father. The Holy Spirit would help the disciples remember Jesus' words so they could preach them and also write them down. This is how we got the Bible without any errors. **“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. All Scripture is inspired by God.”** It was God breathed by the Holy Spirit into the writings of the apostles. Therefore, we know that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. And so we do have Jesus' words. As his disciples, we believe them and practice them. We keep his Word, and so the Father and Son dwell with us.

But the second question is who would manifest Jesus to the world after he ascended into heaven? It would be the disciples speaking Jesus' words. Here again the disciples might have a panic attack. It would be similar to if

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your boss told you that he was leaving and now you were in charge. His parting words were, "Don't worry. Everything's in that thick manual over there." But what if you don't understand the manual? Not everything Jesus said was crystal clear to the disciples. In fact, at this point, they didn't yet understand many of the things he said, like for instance, his suffering, death, and resurrection. Kind of one of the main points of the Bible. But again, not to worry. For the Holy Spirit, their Helper and Counselor and Advocate, would not only remind them of what Jesus said but also teach them all things. The Holy Spirit would help them understand Jesus' words.

The help of the Holy Spirit is kind of like this. A father has a son who's having trouble in school, especially in the language arts. The boy has a fine teacher, but he still can't remember how to spell the words or how to use all the rules of grammar. He doesn't understand his teacher's instruction. When he writes it comes out as incoherent dribble. So the father gets the boy some help. With a recommendation from the teacher, the father sends his son a tutor to help him after school. The tutor sits alongside the boy and gives him confidence. He helps the boy remember and teaches him again so he has understanding of what he learned in class. With the needed help from the tutor, the boy becomes a model student.

In the same way, the disciples couldn't remember all the words Jesus taught them nor could they understand them. So Jesus, their teacher, and God the Father got them some help. They sent the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who got alongside them. He brought to memory all that Jesus said and gave them understanding of his words. The disciples became model apostles.

We see this transformation of Christ's disciples into Christ's apostles on Pentecost. After Jesus' death the disciples had all been huddled in a locked room for fear of the Jews. When they heard the accounts of Jesus' resurrection, they didn't believe until they saw him. And even on the day that Jesus ascended into heaven, they asked if he was now going to restore the earthly kingdom of Israel. They were failing students. They just didn't get it. But on Pentecost the Father and the Son sent the Helper, the Holy Spirit. He came upon the disciples in power. He took them to school. They preached boldly and with confidence of Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. They even spoke in different languages so the foreigners in Jerusalem that day might hear and understand. Jesus manifested himself to the disciples through his Word, and they in turn manifested Jesus to the world through preaching his Word. By the power of the Holy Spirit, over 3,000 Jews came to belief in Jesus Christ that day.

Now Pentecost shows us the two-fold work of the Holy Spirit. The first is that of life giver. He is the Lord and giver of Life. We also call it his work of justification or conversion. Contrary to what many people think, even if Jesus did manifest himself today in bodily form, showed all the proof, and then preached his message of salvation, people still aren't capable of weighing all the evidence and then deciding themselves to follow Jesus. That's because spiritually dead people can't choose spiritual life. It was true in Jesus' day and it's still true today. No dead person on the operating table ever assisted the doctors in bringing himself to life. Likewise, dead men don't cooperate or help in any way in their conversion. It's all the work of the Holy Spirit working by the manifesting of Jesus through his read, spoken, and preached Word. Through this life-giving work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, 3,000 people came to repent and believe through the preached word of the apostles. When you think about it, more people came to faith through the preaching of the apostles in one day than came to faith by Jesus manifesting himself to the world in three years of ministry. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, giving people faith through the Word of Jesus. This is his work in you of raising your new man to faith without any of your help or cooperation. This is his work of justification.

But the second work of the Holy Spirit is his work of sanctification. Now that he's raised your spirit to new life, he helps you lead a sanctified and holy life. He gets alongside your new man, helps you remember Jesus' Words, and gives you understanding. In this work, you do cooperate. The Holy Spirit helps your new man battle the old man. He helps you struggle against sin and temptation and doubt. He's your tutor and helper, advocate and counselor. He helps you keep Jesus' words preserved for us in the Bible. And when you keep Jesus words by believing them and practicing them, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continue to dwell with you. So now Jesus is manifested to the world through your life. He's manifested through your witness and confession of his Word and through your works of mercy to others. But don't panic in your witness. It's not all on your shoulders. The Father and the Son have sent to you the Helper, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps you remember Jesus' Words and guides you in your witness. But remember, you're not the one who saves others. Rather it's all the work of God. You are simply his chosen instrument to manifest Jesus to the world. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.