

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Day of Pentecost
Sunday, June 8, 2025**

**“He Will Give You Another Advocate”
John 14:8-17, 25-27**

The Rev. Dr. David Clark

In the Bible, we find the Holy Spirit depicted in remarkably different ways. The Holy Spirit is imagined powerfully, as a sweeping rush of wind (Gn 1:2, Acts 2:2) or as “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3); yet the Holy Spirit is also imagined as gentle, like a breath (Jn 20:22) or like a descending dove (Mk:10, Mt 3:16, Lk 3:22, Jn 1:32). And this surprising variety of images reminds us, I think, that in depicting the Holy Spirit, we’re really trying to describe the indescribable—and no single image could suffice.

Now, in addition to those unforgettable images for the Holy Spirit—dove and breath and wind and fire—in our Gospel Lesson, we hear a name for the Holy Spirit that really doesn’t get much attention: the Advocate. Jesus tells the disciples: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth [...]. [T]he Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (vv. 16 and 26).

The Holy Spirit as the Advocate... Today, on Pentecost, my red stole is embroidered with flames, the cover of the Order of Service is a dove descending, as our hymns describe wind and breath... But the Holy Spirit as the Advocate—well, that isn’t something we often find in the traditions of the church. Yet, as it turns out, this rather unassuming name for the Holy Spirit is a wonderful witness to the grace and kindness of God in giving the gift of the Spirit.

So, what we have translated as ‘Advocate,’ in the original language is an amazing word; in the original Greek, the word has all these different layers of meaning. Now I know what you’re thinking: “Rev. David, please teach us some Ancient Greek”—so yes, don’t worry, I will, you won’t be disappointed! The word in the original is παράκλητος—or, as it’s come into English, Paraclete. This is your new/ancient word for the day: Paraclete. Let’s say that all together, “Paraclete.” Excellent! So this is a biblical name for the Holy Spirit, and I’d like to share three different layers of meaning in this name.

First, the word Paraclete in Greek literally meant “one who calls beside” (παρά-καλέω)—or better yet, “one who comes alongside.” This is really amazing, and it helps to hear it plugged into the passage; so listen to what our Gospel Lesson sounds like when I replace “Advocate” with “one who comes alongside”: Jesus tells the disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another [one who comes alongside], to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth [...]. [T]he [one who comes alongside], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (vv. 16 and 26).

When we hear it that way, isn’t that incredibly moving? The word “advocate” in English, it can sound a bit formal; but as we learn what the original word meant, we realize this is about the Holy Spirit coming right alongside us, about the intimate presence of God in our lives. As I tried to explore in the Word to the Children, the Holy Spirit does not keep his distance—but is right beside us. In the Holy Spirit, God comes alongside us.

Second, the Paraclete meant someone who takes a person’s side—and for this, the translation as Advocate is spot on. In the ancient world, the word Paraclete was used in legal settings: a Paraclete was really like a lawyer, someone “who plead[ed] [a case] before a judge, [...] a counsel for defence, [a] legal assistant” (Thayer). But it wasn’t only a legal term; more broadly, Paraclete also meant someone “who plead[ed] another’s cause,” “an intercessor” (Thayer, Trenchard), or even a “champion” (Johnston).

Think of a time when somebody stuck up for you... Recently, someone told me a story about how she was once being pressured by peers to do something she didn’t want to do—until suddenly, a friend came right over and said, “Hey, that’s enough! She already said ‘no.’” She shared with me what a difference it made to have someone take her side. And you know, that experience is much like the work of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who advocates on our behalf, who speaks up for us when we can’t speak up for ourselves, who cares about us and our situation and circumstances even when we may lose hope for ourselves. In the Holy Spirit, God comes alongside us—to plead for us.

And third, the word Paraclete meant, quite simply, ‘helper’ (Trenchard, Thayer), somebody “call[ed] to one’s aid” (Johnston), someone coming to help or comfort or encourage. In the old King James Bible, this came across well—because it translated Paraclete not as ‘Advocate’ but as ‘Comforter’; in that classic translation, we hear Jesus say, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you

another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (v. 16). Or, as one of our hymns this morning puts it, “O Comforter, draw near” (de Siena).

Back when I was on Basic Training in the Canadian Army, my platoon was on some exhausting predawn run—when all of a sudden, I just couldn’t keep up anymore, and I started to lag behind. But then another soldier noticed me falling behind—and so she slowed her own pace so that she could come alongside me and check on me. She asked, “Hey, are you okay?” I told her that I was struggling to keep up; but then, instead of leaving me behind, she said: “Oh, then I’ll slow down, too,” she said; “We’ll finish last together...and they’ll have to yell at us both.” I don’t know how I would’ve finished that run if it weren’t for someone coming alongside to help me and encourage me; and that soldier’s actions were a lot like the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In the Holy Spirit, God comes alongside us to plead for us—and to help, comfort, and encourage us.

In the Christian tradition, the church has tended to focus more on other images for the Holy Spirit—the flame or the wind, the breath or the dove... Yet in our Gospel Lesson, we discover a sometimes-overlooked name for the Holy Spirit, one that bears witness to the grace and kindness of God in offering us the presence of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete, the one who comes alongside us, the one who pleads for us, the one who helps and comforts and encourages us. There are times in our lives when we can feel very alone, when we can feel alone or lonely even in the company of others.

And yet, today, on this Day of Pentecost, we may celebrate and thank God that, even when we feel all alone, even in those times when we feel that no one can really understand us—there is one who does: the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, God present in our lives—coming alongside us, taking our part, helping us and comforting us and encouraging us. Happy Pentecost! Amen.