

Exaudi Sermon
John 15:26-16:4
The Comforter
Pastor James Preus
Trinity Lutheran Church

But when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Have you ever heard someone lie to try to bring comfort? Your hair doesn't look bad! (even though it looks like a grizzly in a windstorm). Have you ever told a fib to try to cheer someone up? People often try to help or give comfort to people, especially in their suffering, by lying. It's not necessarily that they are malevolent, they just want to help. Are lies helpful? Do they really bring comfort?

Christ says, "But when the Comforter comes (your translation says "helper" the word is Paraclete. It means advocate, or one sent to help or comfort), But when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth..." The Comforter is the Spirit of truth. He comforts with the truth. He *helps* with the truth. He doesn't offer empty fluff. He's not like a professional sympathy card writer, who can find something heartwarming to write regardless of faith or conviction, The Holy Spirit comforts, he helps with the truth. What truth? "He will bear witness about me" The Holy Spirit will bear witness of the truth of Jesus, who died and rose from the dead and truly ascended at the right hand of God's power, who indeed intercedes for us today.

This is Comfort. This is Help. Yet, this help is often neglected, even despised. I read a news article recently of about a United Church of Canada "pastor" who doesn't believe in God. Doesn't believe in Jesus. So what do they preach at that "church"? "Moral teachings"¹ The people at that church don't think they need the comfort of the Holy Spirit. They don't even believe in him. No, people often don't want the Holy Spirit's help. They don't want the Holy Spirit's help, because they don't want the truth.

The truth that Jesus died on the cross is offensive. It's not "politically correct." Because Jesus didn't die for himself. He died for you. Now the Christian rejoices that Christ died for him, because had Jesus not died in his stead, he would die. And there it is. There is the message that is so intolerable. You're a sinner.

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/24/atheist-pastor-canada-gretta-vosper-united-church-canada>

You deserve to be punished. You deserve to go to hell. This is offensive. Don't call me a sinner. Who says I deserve to be punished. What kind of a dark aged mystic still believes in hell?

Yet, the cross of Christ teaches us this. Jesus was punished for sins. Unbelief, hatred, selfishness, these things earn punishment that must be fulfilled. If they didn't require punishment, then what is Jesus doing on the cross? So, the cross of Jesus offends those who do not want to acknowledge their guilt, the punishment they've earned. Or, it is looked at as complete nonsense by those who reject the idea of divine judgment. Yet, for the sinner in sorrow for his sins, desiring forgiveness, the message of Christ's death and resurrection brings joy, comfort, indeed it helps him out of a bad situation.

Because of the lack of faith the Holy Spirit's help is considered unhelpful and his comfort feels prickly. So, people seek comfort in other things. You see, people need comfort. It's not like those who reject God's Law, reject the idea of punishment, it's not like they don't need comfort. They have sorrow. They have trouble. But they seek help and comfort in other things. Some go to alcohol and drugs. Some go to shallow friendships and lustful relationships. People seek comfort in spiritual concepts that have no grounding in God's word or promise. Many seek and give comfort in rather good ways. They help the poor, donate money, sacrifice time to bring comfort to friends suffering from loss or depression. And of course, we Christians have our physical and emotional needs. We get down. We get sick. We even get picked on and insulted. And we seek comfort and help anywhere and everywhere, except for the message of the cross.

But the fact is, the Holy Spirit knows how to comfort you better than you do. He knows what you need better than you do. Sure, you need food. And God provides that. Sure, you need shelter and healthcare. God provides that too. Perhaps you even need a shoulder to cry on. God sends that your way as well. But what you really need, regardless of who you are, is Jesus. You need Jesus, because you are a sinner. No sugarcoating or excuses, or recycled philosophy will change that fact. And sin kills. Not only the body, but the soul. And this isn't a futuristic thing. This is a present thing. Sin actively kills. It works in and through you. It kills relationships. It kills marriages. It even kills faith. Its goal is to kill faith *before* it kills the body, so that it can kill the soul. And God's judgment is real. He really does hold sinners accountable for their actions. And he really does condemn.

So whether you believe it or not, you need the help of the Holy Spirit. You need his comfort. And Jesus sends him freely. The message the Holy Spirit gives is comforting, because it actually helps. I could assure a person dying of cancer that he'll pull through, but my words can't actually make that happen. The comfort the Holy Spirit gives is so helpful, because it's actually true. Jesus Christ did die for your sins. And God really does credit your sins to Jesus and credit Jesus' holiness and righteousness to you. Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead. St. Paul writes, "I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

What the Holy Spirit speaks to you is an historical fact. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, died for your sins and reconciles you to God. Do you feel guilty for your sins? Do you fear God's judgment? Are you concerned that God might not love you? Or he has forgotten you? The Holy Spirit has a message that is more comforting than any on earth. Jesus died for you! He is risen for you. He, today, intercedes for you before the Father. He forgives your sins and gives you eternal life.

That is real comfort. And it is true.

Jesus says to his disciples, "And you also will bear witness." This is how the Holy Spirit bears witness. He doesn't speak to us through the wind or through a burning in our heart. He speaks to us through God's Word. As he carried men of God to write the Scriptures, so the Holy Spirit speaks. He speak through men. He speaks through your pastor, when he declares your sins forgiven. This is how God has chosen to give you his Holy Spirit, to give you comfort. And the message of the Holy Spirit will never grow old or dull. It will never lose its power to comfort, because the death and resurrection of Jesus will always be relevant to you in your suffering. It will always have the power to forgive your sins and give you eternal life.

So do not only listen to the word of God spoken by your pastor, for that truly is the Holy Spirit speaking to you. But also, speak this word to your loved ones, especially to your children. Tell your children about Jesus. Tell them that he died for them. That he rose for them and forgives them. Comfort them with these words. Give them help that's better than any parenting book. And bring them to church to hear the Holy Spirit witness the truth.

Above all, believe the Holy Spirit. You are forgiven for the sake of Christ's death and resurrection. That is the comfort the Holy Spirit wants you to believe. He knows that's best for you.

Amen.