

The evening after Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples who were hiding behind locked doors. First he said, “Peace to you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The peace Jesus proclaims is the peace we have with God. He has turned God’s anger away. It is after saying this that Jesus breathes out his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives what Jesus gained.

Jesus is our Advocate with the Father. He has returned to the Father, having won for us salvation by his obedient suffering and death. He has made peace by the blood of his cross. He now intercedes for us before the Father, pleading for us on the basis of his own blood and righteousness. As the hymn goes, “Lord, show before the Father’s throne that Thou didst for my sins atone.” This is what Christ is doing for us even today. He is advocating for us.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter. He is sent by the Father and the Son. He delivers to us the comfort, which comes from Christ our Savior. He plants within us the Word of the gospel, which is the very power that save our souls. By this same Word, he causes us to be reborn as new creatures and children of God. By this same Word he keeps us in the faith and continues to comfort us with everything Christ has done for us.

Some of the hymns throughout the history of the church have referred to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete. This is because it is the Greek term Jesus uses to describe him. In our text it is translated as Comforter. Other translations might have Helper or even Advocate. In fact, this is the exact same word St. John uses to describe Christ. We have a Paraclete with the Father – that is, an Advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1).

Jesus pleads for us before the Father. The Holy Spirit comforts us. Jesus pleads for us on the basis of his own righteousness, which he rendered in our place. The Holy Spirit comforts us with that same righteousness. The advocating, interceding, or pleading of Jesus and the comforting of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated. They are joined together with perfect, divine unity.

After all, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same eternal God with the Father. There is no variation or shifting shadow in God. He doesn’t change. He can’t be divided. The Lord is one. He has one substance, one majesty, one will, one plan and purpose, one eternal glory.

Now, think about what this means. It means that our Lord’s pleading before the throne of the Father isn’t some desperate cry from a child to his fickle dad. When Jonathan pleaded with his father, Saul, not to attack or try to kill David, Saul didn’t listen. If you get into legal trouble, you hire a lawyer to advocate for you at court. He pleads your case, using his expert skills in matters of the law. But you can’t be certain that the judge or jury will be swayed by his advocacy. Yet Christ is the Son of God. He shares the same glory and throne of the Father in whom there is no change or shifting. So when he returns to the Father, he advocates as the one who shares the same substance, the same majesty, the same will, plan, purpose, and glory as the Father. As Jesus says, “All things the Father has are mine.” So when he advocates for us, this is certain.

And this is the very certainty the Holy Spirit gives to us in his Word. Jesus told his disciples that it was to their advantage that he was going away. Because Jesus was going away to return to the Father, he was sending them the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The Holy Spirit didn’t come to be another god or lord for the disciples. He came as the same God and Lord. He didn’t come to make us feel better about Jesus

not being with us. No, the comfort he brings us is the very same righteousness and salvation by which Jesus intercedes for us at the Father's right hand.

Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would lead them in all truth. Just as he had led the prophets to write down the divine, saving truth in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit also caused the Apostles and Evangelists to preach and write down for us the full truth and nothing but the truth. This truth is Christ himself who says, "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Jesus didn't come as some solo hero working for himself. He came from the Father from eternity. And it's the same with the Holy Spirit. He isn't some separate force radiating from God. He isn't some shadow of God. No, he is God himself, proceeding from the Father and the Son. So he doesn't speak independently out of himself. He speaks what Christ has given him to speak. And by speaking through the Scriptures, he gives us what Christ has gained. As surely as Jesus intercedes for us before the Father, the Holy Spirit intercedes in us, creating and sustaining faith in our hearts, causing us to call upon God in every need, giving us humble hearts to receive his merciful gospel throughout our lives, and opening our lips to sing a new song to the Lord.

The Holy Spirit speaks through the Word. He teaches us through this Word. And by doing this, he gives us a new song to sing every day. A song isn't new because it was written last week or by Hillsong in the 1990s. No, a song is new because it proclaims the gospel. It proclaims the mercies of God, which as Jeremiah tells us, are new every morning. God is faithful. He doesn't change. And this is why we say that Jesus continues to intercede for us. It's not that God is still angry with us, and Jesus is still trying to make him not angry. No, it is that Jesus' pleading for us is always new. God is always listening to his beloved Son, always sending us his Holy Spirit in his gospel, always causing his face to shine upon us, always comforting us. His mercy endures forever, always new and fresh like the first fruit of the harvest.

So the Holy Spirit continues to give us a new song, whether we are singing a hymn just written, or it was composed hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

Of course, the world sees this new song as old and behind the times. Folks would rather hear sentimental sap, which vaguely speaks of empty dreams of tolerance and good vibes. The other day I heard an old song, which I've heard many times on the radio. It was written in the 1960s. "What the world needs now," the singer declares, "is love, sweet love." She goes on to lecture God as if he doesn't know what the world needs. "Lord, we don't need another mountain," she says. "We don't need another meadow." This is the typical old song sung by this dying world. They think they know what love is, and they imagine that God hasn't figured it out yet. Such songs are old, not only because they were written by people who are today either dead, old, or aging. But they are old, because they do not rely on the righteousness of Christ.

We don't need to convince God of anything. Jesus has already satisfied his anger, and he continues to plead for sinners as he shares his heavenly throne. Instead, the world needs to be convinced of what's true. So Jesus says that the Holy Spirit comes to convince. We might also translate it to say that he comes to convict. The same Greek word is used for both, which is quite appropriate. After all, convincing always includes convicting. We need to be convicted that we are wrong before we can be convinced of the truth. And this truth gives us true conviction of the heart.

So the Holy Spirit convinces the world of sin, but not merely by pointing out all the moral decay in the world. Instead, he convicts the world of sin because they didn't believe in Jesus. All of the immoral behavior, which continues to plague the earth, is only a shadow of the deep unbelief of the sinful heart. Every sin against every commandment originates in the sin against the First Commandment. We have not had God as our only God. We have not feared, loved, and trusted in him with our whole hearts. This is what the Holy Spirit convinces us of through his Word.

The Holy Spirit convinces us of what is true righteousness. It isn't the self-serving works of our own best efforts. No, it is that Christ has returned to the Father. He has died for the sins of the world, fulfilling the law for everyone, and having been raised from the dead he advocates for sinners before God. We don't see him in this world, no matter how impressive its works might be. Instead, we know this righteousness only by faith given to us by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convinces the world of judgment. While everyone wants to judge his neighbor, each is convinced that he knows what will make things better. But nobody knows how to examine his own heart and humble himself before God. It's always someone else's fault. This leads to putting down your neighbor, slandering him, and accusing him. It all comes from the devil, that great accuser who led Adam to justify himself by accusing his wife and God. He rules the hearts and minds of this dying world while people find their comfort in their own good feelings, writing shallow songs, which usually just complain about other people. But this deceiver, this accuser, this devil, whom Jesus calls the ruler of this world, has been judged. Christ has taken away our sins and has silenced the devil's accusations.

This is what the Holy Spirit brings to light. He reveals all of this through his Word. It is true comfort, not grounded in trendy sentiments waiting on the world to change or imagining the world living as one. No, it is comfort grounded in Christ who has overcome the world, who intercedes for us at the throne of grace, who has established peace for sinners. This is our comfort. This is our new song. This is what convinces our hearts and compels our lips to sing out. It gives us conviction to confess the truth without being embarrassed.

So dear friends, don't be ashamed to sing this new song. This is why we teach hymns even to the smallest children. And just as the children sometimes sing in Sunday school, "Hide it under a bushel, NO!" so they learn also to sing:

To me He spake: Hold fast to Me,
I am thy Rock and Castle;
Thy Ransom I Myself will be,
For thee I strive and wrestle;
For I am with thee, I am thine,
And evermore thou shalt be Mine;
The Foe shall not divide us.

Amen.