

“Jesus Sends the Counselor”

“I lost you once; I am not going to lose you again!” It’s sort of a romantic notion that, even if it isn’t said in those words, colors many a book or story or movie about a dear relationship. “I lost you once” speaks of the challenges and hardships, the separations for one reason or another. But these separations drive home just how precious the relationship is. You realize a great blessing most obviously when it is taken away. Before that, you may have taken it for granted. “I lost you once, and now I know without a doubt how valuable you are to me! I’m not going to lose you again. I am going to do everything that I can to make sure of it.”

It doesn’t have the same romantic connotation, but don’t you suppose that the disciples felt that way in the weeks following Easter? They had once lost their friend, their teacher, their Lord, their Master to death. They had watched in disbelief as he was dragged away from them. He was put on trial, unfairly condemned to death, and executed on a cross. For the time that his body lay in the grave, they thought they had lost him forever. They couldn’t help but realize just how important he had been to them when he was taken away. And he was. He was taken away, and he was gone. And then he rose. He appeared to them. He returned to teach and instruct and remind them again. How they must have rejoiced! How they must have thought, “We lost you once; we never want to lose you again!”

And then it came. 40 days later, as we celebrated just last week in our worship services, Jesus met with the disciples again, but this time, as he blessed them, he ascended into heaven and his visible presence was once again gone from them. The disciples were certainly surprised. Until the angels instructed them not to, they simply stood staring up into the sky into which Jesus had disappeared.

Of course, they shouldn’t have been surprised. Jesus had warned them. He had told them repeatedly not only about his arrest, not only about his suffering and death, but also about his resurrection to life and his return to heaven. The gospel read earlier from John 16 records one of those occasions when Jesus told his disciples, before it happened, what was going to happen. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus had spent a great deal of time carefully explaining to his disciples what they could expect. And one of the things that he explained to them was that he would be departing. While this would naturally cause them grief, it was actually good news for them. It was good news, because Jesus promised that he would send the Counselor.

It seems that the disciples forgot what Jesus had said, at least until that promise of his came to fulfillment. That, of course, is what we are celebrating and focusing on today. The Counselor is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to send his disciples to comfort them and to convict the world. In the events of Acts chapter two, we heard how Jesus kept his promise, and we are reminded that he continues to keep it.

So let’s go back with Jesus’ disciples to that Maundy Thursday evening as we take a closer look at Jesus’ words today. He says, “Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” It was natural for the disciples to be grief-stricken at the news Jesus shared that day. He told them about suffering. He told them about dying. He told them about persecution that they would face. He told them that he was going away. They understood this much: if what Jesus said came true, they would suffer pain and loss.

But Jesus assured them that his leaving would be for their good. Can you imagine how the disciples must have reacted? For our good? How could losing Jesus ever be for their good? The answer to that question was the Counselor whom Jesus would send. This was God’s plan, that when Jesus’ work on earth was completed, he would return to heaven. They would see him no longer, even though as true God he would be with them always. But he would also leave them with a precious gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus

calls him here by the Greek word *Paraklete*. Perhaps you have heard that term used for the Holy Spirit. Our version translates it “Counselor.” The word itself suggests the idea of one who is called to the side. An advocate in court was called by this Greek word. For the disciples, the Holy Spirit would take the place of Jesus at their sides, teaching and instructing them, reminding and encouraging them. He would be their counselor. He would comfort them in their sorrow and he would put an end to their grief. How would he do that? By pointing to Jesus! He would allow the disciples to recall Christ’s promises and to apply them to themselves. He would enable them to understand the Scriptures that testify about Jesus. He would move them to speak boldly about Jesus their Savior, who, having completed his work, had ascended into heaven.

And Jesus still comforts his disciples by sending the Counselor. Like his first disciples, we know pain and loss, suffering and sorrow. All of these are sharp reminders that we are sinners living in a sinful world. When we look around us, we do not have the visible evidence that our Lord is with us. In that sense it would be easy enough for us to be discouraged or to have doubts. But we have the Counselor. He has worked in our hearts so that we recognize our sin and see Jesus as our Savior. The Holy Spirit reminds us that Jesus’ ascension into heaven was evidence that his work on earth had been completed. He had completed his sacrifice for the sins of the world. Our Counselor assures us that we will one day see Jesus in heaven. The Holy Spirit comforts Jesus’ disciples.

But the work of the Holy Spirit is not for Jesus’ disciples alone. It is not for us alone. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit has important work in the world. **“When he comes,”** Jesus says, **“he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”** Even as the Holy Spirit comforts, he also convicts. He brings proof in front of people with the result that they either repent or reject, and he does so in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. Jesus explains each a little further.

In regard to sin, the Holy Spirit through God’s Word and God’s messengers does indeed accuse the whole world. He makes it clear that those who refuse to believe will be condemned. That message results in either repentance or unbelief, hardening or faith.

In regard to righteousness, the Holy Spirit points to Jesus’ completed work. He has returned to the Father. He has been removed from our sight. He has done so because he has provided righteousness for the world. He took all sins upon himself and suffered for them. He rose from the dead in victory, proving that righteousness was won. Again the world reacts either in faith or in unbelief.

Finally, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit convicts in regard to judgment, **“because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”** Satan’s doom is sealed. The serpent’s head has been crushed. Those who continue to live lives ruled by him will meet the same fate and the same judgment.

Just as the Holy Spirit used the disciples long ago to share that message with the world, so he still works through us today as we share the same message. Pentecost is for us a reminder of the vitally important work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives. It is a reminder that the unbelieving world needs that same gift. There are differences between us and the apostles to be certain. We don’t expect the sounds of a rushing wind to alert us to the Spirit’s work. We don’t anticipate flames like fire or speaking in unlearned languages. But the Holy Spirit works to point us to Jesus. He comforts us and convicts and convinces the world through us.

We also didn’t go through the traumatic experience of losing Jesus the way that the disciples did. They walked and talked with him until he was taken away. They must have felt like crying out, “We lost you once; we never want to lose you again.” We see and experience Jesus with eyes of faith. We see him in his Word and hear his teaching. He has given us the Counselor to assure us of his promise to us: “You are mine, and I am never going to lose you. Ever.”

The Text: John 16:5-11 (NIV84)

⁵“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. ⁷But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.