

Sixth Weekend of Easter (RCL/A)
Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21
May 16-17, 2020
Holy Trinity Lutheran, Manasquan, NJ

Maybe you're familiar with a kinda kooky TV series called, "Better Call Saul." The actor Bob Odenkirk plays a way-less-than-honest lawyer named Saul who advertises big time over the airwaves, advising viewers that for any legal issue, they "Better Call Saul!" to represent them. Another word for lawyer is "advocate," one who advocates for a client. In the U.S. Navy, lawyers are part of the JAG Corps, JAG being shorthand for "Judge Advocate General."

If we're in legal trouble, get arrested and are told, "You have one phone call," most people (at least on TV, in the movies and in books) choose to call a lawyer. You may **want** to hear the comforting voice of a family member or friend, but what you **need** most of all is a legal advocate with the know-how to spring you.

Today's Gospel immediately follows last week's, with St. John continuing to tell us Jesus' words at dinner the night before He died. Jesus has just told His disciples He's only going to be around only a little longer; He's going away. Then He says:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

(John 14:15-16)

Remember, the Bible wasn't written in English, but in Hebrew and Greek, so what we hear is always a translation. That word *Advocate* is sometimes translated differently. The English word closest to the Greek is the old-fashioned, seldom-used word *Paraclete*. (I'm a reader, and I don't know about the rest of you bookworms, but the only time I've **ever** seen the word paraclete is in this Gospel reading or on Confirmation greeting cards. Since the word paraklete is almost solely associated with the Holy Spirit, who is often symbolized by a dove, I've always wondered if kids think the word is parakeet, not paraclete....) A paraclete is literally someone we **call on**, as in, when we're in trouble. So maybe the title for this Gospel could be, "Better Call the Holy Spirit!" When in need, know where to turn first. When up a spiritual creek without a paddle, know to Whom to turn first.

John Wycliffe lived in England in the 1300's and initiated the first English translation of the Bible. That early version uses the word *Comforter* instead of *Advocate* or *Paraklete*. "*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter....*" Martin Luther like the word *Comforter*, too, in his translation of the Bible into German. In his sermon on this chapter of St. John's Gospel, one of his favorite New Testament Scripture passages, Luther wrote:

...a Comforter... is one who can fill a saddened heart with laughter and joy toward God, bids you be of good cheer because of the forgiveness of your sins, slays death, opens heaven, and makes God smile upon you.¹

But this Comforter doesn't just give you a hug when you're sad, doesn't just give you hope of a resurrection reunion with loved ones in time to come. Luther says this Comforter won't just **soothe** you in time of grief but will also **steel** you against any kind of adversity and will **fortify** you with faith. Luther paraphrases Jesus saying to His disciples then and now:

[The Spirit] will strengthen you and make you courageous and bold, far better than I can do by My physical presence... Therefore you will not lack for comfort, strength, courage and wisdom.²

This Comforter is sticking around: forever! No one can banish this Spirit of the risen Christ:

... neither the world nor the devil will deprive you of Him, no matter how they rant and rave.

"How many things do we have to be anxious about? Let us count the ways...." There's an invisible virus for which there is no proven treatment and no vaccine, and the lockdown world is beginning to open up. We live at the Shore and the numbers in our communities are sure to mushroom, very soon! Memorial Day is just one weekend away....

Let's look back at what we've been through these past couple months and let the words of this weekend's psalm, Psalm 66, speak for us:

*For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us just as silver is tried.
You brought us into the net;
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.
You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water....*

Psalm 66:10-12a

Those who have been ill, who have been working on the front lines, who in one way or another have been in the teeth of the pandemic, have had a more profoundly disturbing experience than those of us who have been sheltering at home or primarily working or studying from home. Yet we've all been tested, to a greater or lesser extent.

That favorite Scottish commentator of mine, William Barclay, used the word *helper* instead of *Advocate*, *Paraklete* or *Comforter*, and has this to say about the Holy Spirit:

... [The Spirit helps us] to cope with things. That is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit. He takes away our inadequacies and enables us to cope with life. The Holy Spirit substitutes victorious for defeated living.³

Wow, how much do people pay and to what lengths do people go to seek help "to cope with things"? God gives us the gift of healers and therapies of many kinds, the gift of medications as well, but in addition to counseling, yoga, physical exercise, herbal and pharmaceutical remedies, are we also tuning in to the spiritual strength available to us through our baptism and through the Word of God? Are we remembering, when in trouble, "Better call the Holy Spirit!?" And not just

“when in trouble,” but every day, day in and day out, for strength to live out our holy calling in this world as Christians?

Our vocation is not just to cope with our own “things,” like family, household, job, financial worries, health concerns, but to help others cope with **their** “things,” like the need for food, shelter, a safe place to live, asylum from danger, hope in hopeless situations, prayers for deepened faith, increasing hope, enduring love. In helping others, in sharing our material and spiritual blessings (which the Lord gives us but doesn’t intend for us to stockpile), we are blessed to become an answer to others’ prayers. We are also obediently keeping God’s commandments. By showing love to our neighbor we are also showing our love of God. What does Jesus say? *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* A little earlier He had said:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13:34)

He sets the bar high. But He has also asked the Father to send us an Advocate, a Comforter, a Helper, who is with us forever, and who enables us to do whatever we ask in our Savior’s name, even greater works than He has done.... (John 14:12-14)

In my notes on this Gospel, I found a quote from our dear friend Ruth Walsh. She must have shared this morning prayer with us one day as she led our Intercessory Prayer Group, which she did for years. Here is Ruthie’s prayer, which we may want to borrow for ourselves:

“Lord, what do you have for me to do today? You’d better help me!”

Yup. “Better call the Holy Spirit!” Amen

¹*Luther’s Works* (Vol. 24, St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), p. 115.

²*Ibid*, p. 101.

³William Barclay, *Gospel of John* (Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), p. 167.

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