

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: John 14:23–31**

**Sermon: Pentecost 2019**

We tend to think of Pentecost as the beginning of something new (the season of the Church and the birthday of the Christian Church), but it is also a climactic consummation: it is in a real sense the final Sunday of the Easter season and the fulfillment of Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit to "fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love." Liturgically, then, Pentecost serves as a joyous and festive bridge between the Time of Easter and the Time of the Church.

Pentecost is the longest season in the Church Year by far; for almost thirty straight weeks we focus on various aspects of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible doesn't give us much help in picturing the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps, in a sense, it gives us too much help: there are so many different and contrasting pictures of the Spirit in the Scriptures.

The Spirit appears as a dove; then as tongues of fire; then again, as a loud, rushing wind; in other places as a quiet whisper.

On the other hand, the Bible does provide some very clear and helpful information—divine teaching—about who the Spirit is and what he does for us as Christians. Over and over again in the Gospel of John, and here in our text from John 14, Jesus uses a very unique word to describe the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word is *paraklētos*, which literally means “one who is called to and stands by one’s side.” This word is translated in a number of different ways in various versions of the Bible: “Helper,” “Advocate,” “Comforter,” or “Counselor.”

***“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you,” says Jesus. “But the Helper [the Comforter, the Counselor], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (vs 25–26).***

I am going away, says Jesus, but don't worry, don't be afraid; let not your hearts be troubled. I am leaving behind for you and for Christians of all times and in all places a Helper, a Comforter, a full-time, free-of-charge Counselor, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is "The World's Best Counselor." So, what does a good "counselor" do? More important, what does this Counselor, the Holy Spirit, do for us—and how does he do it?

According to Jesus in John 16, one of the most important things the Holy Spirit does as our Counselor is a rather unpleasant thing. He counsels us by convicting us of our sin (John 16:8). He uses God's Word to confront us with those secret or not-so-secret areas of our lives that are not pleasing to our heavenly Father, that are tearing down rather than building up our brothers and sisters in Christ, that are damaging our witness for Christ, and that are also hurting us, preventing us from enjoying the blessings that come through willing and joyful obedience to God's commandments.

Now, this is not an easy job that the Holy Spirit has to do. The hard thing about it is not that he has to keep track of all our sins; that's relatively simple for the Spirit as the all-seeing, all-knowing God. What's hard about it is that the Spirit has to deal constantly with hardheaded people like us, who have a very hard time acknowledging our guilt and our sin.

Eldon Weisheit was a longtime LCMS pastor and author who wrote books for and about kids, including several volumes of children's sermons used by many pastors. In one of those books, Pastor Weisheit tells the story of one of the first children's sermons he ever attempted as a pastor. With the children gathered around him, he held up pieces of paper with various words written on them and asked the children to raise their hands if they thought the words applied to them.

He held up words like "short," "tall," "smart," "strong," "popular," "handsome," "pretty," and so on, and each time at least some of the children raised their hands.

Then he held up the word “sinner” and waited . . . and waited . . . and waited, until finally one youngster in the front row took hold of his little brother’s hand and lifted it high into the air.

We can’t help but laugh at that cute little story, but our laughter probably has—or at least ought to have—a rather “nervous” edge to it, because we know full well that it’s not just children who are anxious to point a finger (or all five fingers!) at somebody else.

I read another story recently about a woman who came to her counselor confessing or complaining that she just didn’t feel she was growing in her spiritual life. When he asked her what she thought the problem might be, she immediately proceeded to tick off about a dozen reasons, all of which put the blame squarely on the shoulders of somebody else. “The pastor’s sermons don’t speak to me; the style of worship isn’t the way I’d like it to be; people at church are so unfriendly; my husband doesn’t support me; my children don’t behave the way they should,” and on and on and on.

The counselor said he took a deep breath, prayed a silent prayer, looked the woman in the eye and said: “Have you ever considered the possibility that the main problem in your spiritual life might not be the pastor, the people at church, your husband, or your children? Have you ever considered the possibility that the problem might have something to do with you?”

The best counselors in my life have been people who’ve cared so much about me that they have dared to speak the truth in love, even when they knew the truth would probably hurt, even when they knew that they might suffer and be hurt as a result of speaking the truth.

That’s the kind of Counselor the Holy Spirit is. Always loving, always compassionate, always looking out for our best interests—but excruciatingly honest, never afraid to tell us the truth, too concerned about our welfare to hide from us the sin that’s harming us.

Fortunately for us, convicting us of our sins is not the Holy Spirit’s only job as our Counselor. In fact, it’s not even his most important job.

After all, even the devil knows how to accuse people of being sinners—the name *Satan* actually means “The Accuser.” That’s why, in Lutheran theology, this convicting or accusing role of the Spirit is known as his “strange” or “alien” work. The Spirit’s true or proper work is not to convict us but to comfort us with the Gospel, with the Good News of our forgiveness in Christ—which is something the devil would never do, even if he could.

According to Scripture, the Spirit convicts us not just to make us feel guilty but to lead us to true repentance, to prepare our hearts to hear and believe the comforting assurance of our forgiveness because of what our Savior, Jesus, has done for us. As I mentioned earlier, some versions of the Bible translate this word “Counselor” as “Comforter.” That’s a good and scripturally meaningful translation as well, because that’s the Holy Spirit’s ultimate mission and goal: to convince us and to keep on reminding us that although we are poor, miserable sinners, God still loves us more than we can possibly imagine and delights to claim us as his dear children in Christ Jesus.

The Holy Spirit carries out his role as Comforter in some very simple yet powerful ways. He speaks to us through the Scriptures and tells us that, because of what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross, our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west, that though our sins are like scarlet, we have been made as white as snow through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit also speaks through the words of the pastor, who has been called by God to say to those who stand before God with humble and repentant hearts: “I forgive you all your sins,” not by my power, not by my authority, not by any special holiness in me, but in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ whom I serve on your behalf.

The Holy Spirit also comforts us daily as we claim the promises God made to us at our Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and he comforts us by feeding us with the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins.



And there is still another way the Holy Spirit comforts us, and this way should not be overlooked or underestimated. The Spirit also comforts us through one another, as we speak to each other the words of forgiveness that Christ has spoken to us. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”* (2 Cor 1:3–4).

Even with all these other ways of receiving God’s forgiveness, there’s something special about receiving assurance of that forgiveness through the lips of another human being, especially someone close to us: through the lips of a wife or husband, father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister or Christian friend.

Much more could be said about the counseling ministry of the Holy Spirit: we could talk about how he prays for us with groans and sighs too deep for words, and how he teaches us to pray to our dear Father in heaven. We could talk about how he counsels us to know right from wrong and to discern God's will for our lives; how he helps us to grow up in our faith, so that we can move from the milk to the meat of God's Word; how he gives us gifts to use in service to others and how he empowers us to be Christ's witnesses; how he guards and protects us against the evil one and keeps us strong in the faith until the Last Day. All of these other works of the Holy Spirit are based on and grow out of the Spirit's dual work as Convicter and as Comforter.

If we ever forget that we are sinners, we might as well forget everything else we've learned about God and about the Christian faith, because, as John says in his first letter, ***"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"*** (1 John 1:8).

On the other hand, if we poor, miserable sinners ever stop believing that we are forgiven, we might as well stop believing everything else, because if God's message of forgiveness is a lie, then how can we believe anything else he tells us in his Word? Why should we pray? Why should we serve? Why should we witness? What would there be to witness about?

The Holy Spirit's job is to make sure, first of all, that we never forget that we are sinners, and secondly, to make sure that we never stop believing that we are God's precious, holy, forgiven children through the life and death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen