

PERSEVERANCE POWERED BY THE PARACLETE

...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go I will send him to you. John 16:7

We have nothing in our lives that fully compares to being put out of the synagogue in first century Judea. This assembly was their everything: spiritual home, family, social club, business network, and identity. To get a sense of it, it would be like getting excommunicated from the church, banned from the gym, expelled from school, fired from your job and divorced from spouse and shunned by family all in the same day with no hope of reversal.

But we do know what it is to be shunned from certain social circles simply because of our faith. Dare to talk about the sin of abortion as murder. Dare to speak of homosexual behaviours whether within or outside committed relationships and you'll get derision of an increasing number of the swayed public. Dare to speak of Jesus being the Way – the only Way to salvation and you're no longer possessing the cardinal Canadian virtue of "tolerance". Dare to live out the faith and some suffering is inevitable.

The road can seem long and hard at times. So last week I preached on how Jesus gives us a Christian perspective on time. It is only a little while. Behold I am coming soon. Truly, for the Christian, if it isn't yet 5 minutes to the midnight of His coming it feels like it. That's a comfort. But there is more. So we hear the comfort Jesus offers in providing perseverance powered by the Paraclete.

Call Him the Paraclete. That's a transliteration of the original. Our translation chooses to call him the Helper. Others call him the Advocate. Still others the Comforter. The reason for the diversity is that He is the Holy Ghost. He's Almighty God, third person of the Trinity and the scope of his activity and comfort cannot be limited by any one name. So I would opt for that unique word "Paraclete". He powers perseverance.

But more than that. There are the gifts of trust, comfort and joy. Whenever the Holy Spirit works and creates faith in the heart there is joy. *But that is more next week's focus. This week we consider perseverance powered by the Paraclete.)*

But we can't help but ask, wasn't the Holy Spirit already present from Eternity? Didn't such gifts of perseverance powered by the Paraclete belong to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? David and Solomon? It must be so if he is truly God. Indeed the Holy Spirit was present from all eternity and at creation with the Word who in the beginning was with God and was God. In verse one, God uses the one name Elohim, but it is also one name that is plural. The Three persons in One. In verse 2 we read "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters". And this spirit brought forth gifts of perseverance and strength. Indeed it was so even as we read from Isaiah last week: "they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary".

Yes, though God in Three Persons was present from all eternity and his nature and powers do not change. Yet, it may be observed that He is continually manifested in greater degrees and ways in human time. God always was, but in Exodus 3, as Moses stood before him, there was the burning bush and the pronouncement of the Name “Yahweh” “I am that I Am”. Yes, the Second Person of the Trinity had always been present “In the beginning was the Word” but in human time, he took on human flesh. Likewise the Spirit of God had always been there but in human time he comes in greater degrees on Pentecost with the fiery tongues and gifts of the Spirit.

We look forward to the New Testament and the new gifts of the Spirit. Ultimately we will look forward to the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. And the restoration of the Garden of Eden sort of pre-fall experience of God, where we speak to Him face to face and behold His Glory.

We are blessed to live in a time when “the other Paraclete” has come. With this more fully manifested Presence of God also comes a real increase in the power of the Kingdom over the Prince of this world. So Jesus promises “Truly, truly I say to you, He that believes in me will do even greater works than I” (John 14:12). The Holy Spirit brings more powerful means to wage a much more powerful attack on sin, death and Satan than ever manifested before to do greater works than ever before. A lot of people hearken back to “The Golden Age” but the Christian looks forward to an age to come. It is ever new. It is the New Testament. It is the New Jerusalem. It is a “greater battle” and victory in an age of “greater sin”. So many people are eager to “turn the clock back” but the Christian is rejoicing, even in suffering knowing that “the best is yet to come”.

Look up, for your redemption draweth nigh!

Why does the Paraclete manifest greater power in the New Testament? It has everything to do with Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. It has to do with the work he does in “the little while” of last week’s reading. Jesus has been with us from all eternity, but it is only in New Testament Time that our Lord assumed human flesh, atoning for sin in human flesh, that he might rise in human flesh and take this human flesh into heaven. He intercedes for us. In the Gospel reading today we hear of the Holy Spirit glorifying the Christ. He gives Him glory because of his work of salvation. It is a work shared by all three persons of the Trinity. Likewise they share in manifesting the power given through such work. God could do all things at any time he would choose. But he chose to keep some things hidden until “the fullness of time”. Just as the fullness of the Word made Flesh would wait to become manifest only in the fullness of time so also the Holy Spirit, “the other Paraclete”.

Truly our Lord gives his disciples, past, present and future, real comfort and a real basis for comfort in today’s reading. Do you suffer? Then take on a Christian perspective of time. Do you still suffer? Take comfort in the coming of “another Paraclete”.

His work is real. His glory is real. The presence of the Holy Spirit is something to be experienced in three ways.

- 1) He will convince the world of sin because they do not believe in me.
- 2) He will convince the world of righteousness – that is the righteousness of Christ he earns before the Father.
- 3) He will convince the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is already judged.

The signs have already accompanied the apostles with the coming of this Holy Spirit. Never before had the world seen such great mass conversions. Never before could we see people so diametrically opposed to Christ suddenly turn to Christ and ask “What then shall we do to be saved”.

Peter responds “Be baptized”! And in the baptism of Christ they don a new righteousness. They fulfill what the prophets only knew in shadow. Isaiah says I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. But St. Paul adds “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:21).

St. Paul gives further specifics concerning the righteousness of God saying “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Phillippians 3:9)” It is the righteousness of Christ and strictly the righteousness of Christ that delivers us. And by what means does the righteousness of Christ come to us? The means of grace of course! Baptism.

And in the seal of baptism we are saved. In the act of baptism we have the death and resurrection of Christ. In between those events we have the descent of Christ into hell as we say in the Apostles’ Creed. What happened then? He proclaimed victory over the spirits who were in prison. He proclaimed victory over sin, death, and eternal death and damnation.

Who is to say such is so? The one who died and rose again in the sight of witnesses. The one whose words are proven truth in the fulfillment in the signs of the Spirit’s presence as it says in Mark 16: ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”.

Demons are continually cast out today. Satan is continually rebuked and renounced even as we ask such things in baptism. We ask the candidate: “Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways”?

As we live out our baptism we continue to renounce him. We renounce him as one already defeated. Take heart, Jesus says in John 16 “I have overcome the world”.

Yes, the Christians’ Way as they stay in the Way the Truth and the Life is also the narrow way. It is fraught with struggles. But we have hope, as those early apostles were given hope. It is only a little while. We learn the Christian perception of time. It is also a way where we are given perseverance powered by the Paraclete. Take hope. Next week as we continue our studies we discover that we don’t just have perseverance as a man survives – just survives trials but rather also true joy. As John 16:22 encourages us that while preserving we may have a joy “that no man can take away from us”.

May we therefore be encouraged. Amen.