

Children's sermon (flame)

(Have) you ever tried to explain something to a friend, or stranger, and the more you talked, the worse the example's image became? Trying to do that is about as bad as playing charades with words! It's like....this. Or it's like that but it isn't this or that. It's different.

Well, I know it happens when people (try to) "explain" the Holy Spirit. It's like when you have one of those awesome experiences....no....that's not it. It's like when you get all excited.....no...that's not it. It's....a mystery!

Every year we celebrate Pentecost Sunday...and it seems (to me) that we'd rather not dwell on the Spirit because it's different. It is! Even my dramatic definition....the POWERFUL presence of God within us NOW...leaves a lot to the imagination. Difficult as it may seem, the Spirit is essential for us to acknowledge as a facet of God, the three in one.

This difficulty isn't just ours. When you read from John's Gospel of the Holy Spirit's coming, translators have used a number of divergent words to describe the Spirit's nature.

Today's translation is Jesus saying ("I will) send the Counselor...." What does a counselor do? They ask hard questions. They encourage us to face our deepest troubles or fears. They help guide us to a place of understanding. Nice. The Holy Spirit is like a counselor. Good? Not totally.

Another translation (uses the) word Advocate. Jesus says "I will send the Advocate." So, what's an advocate? An advocate speaks in support of, or in defense of someone who has no voice. We have advocates for the homeless. We have advocates for children. We have advocates for peace, for justice, for health-care, for education. These people use their experience and education to speak for those who have no voice.

So, the Holy Spirit is an advocate for us who intercedes with God. In the Nicene Creed it is the Spirit who gathers the church catholic, and who forgives sins. The advocate speaks on our behalf...Good? Not totally.

Another translation (says) "I will send the Comforter...." What does a comforter do? It offers security, safety, assurance. In most of our lives that role more often falls to our mothers. She will comfort me. In a world where violence, corruption, and danger abound the Comforter would be a good image of God where we could find refuge. Good? Yes, but.....

The origin of this word is Greek.....(and) it is "Paraclete." And while "paraclete" can be (translated) Counselor, Advocate, or Comforter....it literally (means) "one who walks alongside us....." Consider this.....

When in our lives do we walk alongside of someone? (Our) childhood friends walked alongside us as we walked to school, or to the park to play ball, or on any childhood adventure. (Our loves) walked alongside us, often times hand in hand. In those times conversations were dreams, affections, and connecting of our hearts. Walking alongside infers an intimacy.

(Two) weeks ago Arizona teachers walked alongside one another advocating for justice in the classroom. In such cases walking alongside brings strength and unity. The Spirit walks alongside us daily.

(John), the Gospel writer offers us an image of God who walks alongside us, every moment of every day. (BUT)....and there's always a but....the Spirit (doesn't) necessarily comfort the afflicted. It doesn't. And the Spirit doesn't necessarily advocate for our spiritual laziness. It doesn't. And the Spirit doesn't necessarily counsel us to sit. The Spirit stirs. The Spirit chides. The Spirit commands us to get up and walk alongside.

In John's Gospel where the Holy Spirit is moving, trouble is right around the corner! (Jesus) came to show us the power of mercy...the love that forgives, yet, it got him into trouble. In fact, when Jesus did any of those Spirit- things: counsel, advocate, or comfort the (world's) response to him was fear and rage. His Spirit-led teaching and acts would get him killed. He was a threat, and the best way to deal with a threat is to cut it out....like a tumor.

(Where) the Spirit moves.....there's a troubling power at work. I love the image of Ezekiel in the Meggido Valley. (It was) Israel's Gettysburg. It was Israel's Alamo. (Defeat) and death was all around. There was no discernable life there, just silence. Dried bones don't speak, but they have a story to tell. Then there's the question: Son of man, can these bones live? Only you know, Lord. Speak to the bones. Rattling filled the valley echoing off the rocky hills. (Ligaments), tendons, muscle fibers, nerves, blood vessels, skin....but they sat there.....lifeless. (The 1<sup>st</sup>) zombie apocalypse. Speak the word, preacher, (call) the four winds....and the Spirit, the winds CPR'd the vast army and they stood up. There came a new spirit into them. It was life, alive because of..... the Spirit.

(The Spirit) filled that room with mighty wind, fire, nothing comforting about it. And they were given their mission. (Speak) O people of God. Out there. Speak of God's grace. Out there. Speak of Jesus' rising from the dead. Out there. Speak your love. Out there. Speak your faith. Out there. Speak your hope that others may join in this troubling movement.

It is the Living Word of God that the Spirit rides upon. (It is) the grace and mercy of God that the Spirit gives walking alongside us. It is Pentecost and the rush of wind, and breath of God has called your name....

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