

SERMON: "A GOD-GIVEN ADVOCATE"
TEXT: NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 17:22-31
NEW TESTAMENT JOHN 14:15-31

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INTRODUCTION

Thinking back, almost every house I have called home has had some kind of ditch or creek in the backyard, usually small or even dry like the one here. Then with a big rain the water rises ... sometimes enough to make a muddy mess Especially so with the home in Georgia where I grew up – THE ditch My dad spent a lot of time watching and working on THE ditch

That was when he was home. His job kept him busy. That was especially true during my high school years. Jimmy Carter was the President, and my dad was the Special Agent in Charge of the Atlanta office of the US Secret Service Lots of trips to Carter's farm in Plains. Lots of events in Atlanta.

Those Atlanta events included lots of church services, especially visits to the big churches in Atlanta's black community like Ebenezer Baptist, where Dr. King served a decade before, and Wheat Street Baptist where William Holmes Borders served as pastor. My dad really took to Rev. Borders preaching style

He liked how Borders would often call out to the heavens (and the congregation) while he was preaching, like he was at a crossroads asking for directions, saying 'Help me, Holy Ghost! Help me!' It became a thing in our household Something we'd say when we were stuck, couldn't figure out where to go, what to do ... including when my 5-year-old brother got stuck in THE ditch

Yes, that may seem a simple or silly illustration. The Kivetts laugh when we think about it ... a five-year-old stuck in the mud calling out like a preacher "Help me, Holy Ghost! Help me" He shouted it out. Then he somehow got out of the mess that he was in. That could preach, couldn't it?

What does the Holy Ghost do? Get us out of messes?

In this chapter, Jesus tells his disciples about the Holy Spirit, an Advocate

"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. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

ADVOCACY

Jesus introduces a word that John in his telling has not yet used – advocate also translated as helper or comforter. I like all three translations
The three translations fit together well. They describe what the Spirit does

Comforter and helper. They seem a bit more familiar. We know what that looks and feels like. I often lean into that language of comfort when I read John 14 at funeral services when we especially need to hear those words of comfort
But for today, let's focus more on the translation closest to the original Greek, the language of an advocate ... an advocate given to us by Jesus

Advocacy. That sounds feistier than comfort. Louder. Maybe even confrontational. Think about where and when we usually hear the word, how it is used. It sounds legal, like the person arguing on your behalf.
It sounds political, like using power for a purpose, for the people

Advocacy is a certain kind of comfort, a certain kind of help.
Help when needed, help getting us unstuck, help getting us out of messes

How does this Advocate work? What does Jesus say about this advocate?
He makes this introduction while doing one thing in the larger context and another in the more immediate context, think general and specific or maybe an outline. The larger context, like last week, is the goodbye he is sharing with his followers who are worried about what is next.

The gift of the Holy Spirit, this Advocate, is given to help calm their/our nerves
This is Jesus saying, "I still got you. I may not be here in person, but the Advocate, the Comforter will be with you forever. "Forever," Jesus says
He also calls this Advocate "the Spirit of truth."

That is what these chapters are about ...
Jesus saying with references to both the Father and the Spirit, "We got you!"
These particular verses, verse 15-31 dive a bit deeper into the how with a focus on the Spirit as advocate. From the Advocate being described as the Spirit of truth we continue reading from verse 18

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

John just keeps making the connection over and over in these verses
In these chapters, in his whole gospel – the connections. Father to Son, Son to Father, And then the Spirit connected to both and connecting us to both
Connecting us. We are not orphaned, not on our own. We're connected!

CONNECTED

Really cool thing about these verses where Jesus announces he is giving us this advocate. It is a gift given to us. It is like that Christmas gift given to you ... and your little brother or big sister or however your family is put together It is given to the disciples, to the church – little c and big C

Those connections are to God in three persons and to one another
Those connections are reflected in how much talk there is in these verses about commandments and keeping God's word – a clear connection as to determine the truth. Is it in line with God's word ... and God's work.

The advocacy the Spirit will be doing will be manifest in what we are doing and how we are doing it. The Spirit's advocacy will be evident in our advocacy

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them ... Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

Are we doing what God commands, what God expects, what God requires?
I'm relatively confident that if I asked you what God requires, you'd be able to think of an answer – most likely a three-point answer

I'm more and more convinced that doing what God requires is keeping the commandments, keeping God's word ... and at the same time it is so much more than just following the rules. It is advocacy it is helping pull each other (and others) out of messes That is doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God

The Spirit as an advocate works through our works
I see that in connections to God by connecting to one another.
The Spirit is at work in and through those connections. In my ministry with you, I've tried to help make those connections, maybe make some introductions. I have been so blessed by those many connections, so very blessed.

One of the very best things about those connections is the blending of our unique and varied gifts, each one an instrument of God's peace and purpose.
Each one made stronger through its connections to another – better together

You know down-sizing is not easy. Thanks to a word from a friend, I summoned the courage to sell, give away or throw away some stuff – the extension ladder (what am I doing up here?), the container with all the varied nails and screws and washers, even my chop saw. Don't need those things

SUMMARY

To be honest, I never was as handy as I wanted to be ... but I was and am connected!
It's taken me a while to learn this. But it's not up to me. Life is not Do It Yourself
It is about being connected to God and to God's people and to sharing
a gift, an advocate that has been given to us to share and to use

Thanks to that Spirit, that Advocate, I can be handier with you and with them
than I ever have been or will be with that saw, that ladder, and that container
full of old nails and screws and washers. I can channel that Advocate
and be an advocate for others. I can be an instrument of God's peace

I can be an instrument of God's peace that helps people out of some messes
whether it be a muddy ditch or a frozen snow drift (that was me in the snow drift).
I trust I have been in my life and work, an instrument of God's peace and purpose
I know you, y'all, all y'all have been, are and will continue to be!
I know it. I've seen it!

To that end, let's end the sermon with a prayer we've often prayed
It is one worth learning and teaching. I'd like to close with the prayer
of St. Frances of Assisi. It is on the screen.

Show images – Prayer of St. Frances (2 slides)

Can we pray that prayer together ... Then end it with a prayer
from Rev. Borders, "Help me, Holy Ghost. Help me!"

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me so love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*Divine Master, grant that I may not seek so much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are raised to eternal life.*

"Help me, Holy Ghost. Help me!"