

An Intimate Friendship

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[0 : 00] Lord Jesus, we give you thanks that you enabled John to remember what you said and to write it down accurately for us.

I pray in your mercy and grace that these words would not be just mere words, but that you would take us into the reality the words are describing as never before.

We pray it in your name and for your glory. Amen. The space in which he calls us to follow.

I invite you to continue exploring with me the space in which the risen and ascended Jesus is now calling us to follow.

It is not the space in which the first disciples followed him. The space in which they could see him with their eyes and touch him with their hands.

[1 : 06] Nor is it the space in which we will one day follow him when we will see him face to face in the new heavens and the new earth. The space in which we now follow him is marked by an absence.

The absence of his physical presence. Not the absence of his presence as we shall learn, but the absence of his physical presence. And the amazing thing is that Jesus says that this is to our advantage.

John 16 verse 7. I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage. It is to your good that I go away. It is. How can that possibly be? It was on Thursday night of Holy Week. The night that Jesus gave himself over to death.

Jesus had gathered the first community of disciples around a meal. They met in a second story apartment in the upper room as it came to be called. Somewhere in the downtown core of the city of Jerusalem.

[2 : 20] They were all reclining around a large wooden table. Jesus has spread the table with the food and drink of the Jewish Passover meal. The most sacred event in Israel's life.

If you want to get a feel for it, think Christmas Eve. Think candles, breads, fruits, family, music, tender fellowship. As the evening progresses, Jesus does a number of surprising things. He begins by changing the liturgy of the Passover meal. He takes a loaf of bread and after speaking over it, the traditional blessing, He breaks it and hands it to His disciples saying, This is my body. Your body? Your body? He then takes a cup of wine and after speaking over it, a traditional blessing, He hands it to His disciples and says, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Your blood? Your blood? Then He gets up from supper, takes off His outer garments, wraps a towel around His waist, gets down on His knees and begins washing His disciples' feet.

[3 : 34] They are taken by this divine humility. After washing each of their feet, He then goes back to the table and takes His seat. And then comes the biggest surprise of all.

Little children, He says. It's a tender word that He uses. Little children, I am with you only a little while longer. I'm going away, back to the one who sent me.

And for the rest of the evening, Jesus prepares His disciples and us to go on living in the absence of Jesus' physical presence.

Which is why John 14 to 16, the so-called upper room discourse, begins the way it does. Let not your hearts be troubled. Troubled.

It's a verb with intense feeling in it. It means to shudder. It means to be thrown into confusion. Jesus' announcement of His imminent departure made the disciples shudder.

[4 : 43] Understandably so. It threw them into confusion. Understandably so. For three years, for three wonderful years, they had enjoyed His company.

For three years, they had enjoyed His visible, audible, tangible presence. They'd come to depend upon His companionship, upon His intimate friendship.

When they were with Jesus, they felt secure. They experienced hope. They were not afraid. They knew themselves to be deeply loved, unconditionally so. I came forth from the Father, and I'm going back to the Father.

I am going away. They shuddered. Their hearts were filled with fear. The fear of now having to go on alone. The fear of having to face the future without a trusted friend.

Ever felt that way? Jesus' upper room discourse is addressed to those fears. The fears raised by the surprising announcement that very soon, He would be going away.

[5 : 54] But what really surprises the disciples and us is what He goes on to say. John 16, 7 again. But I tell you the truth, this is to your advantage.

I tell you the truth. It is for your good that I go away. How can that be?

How can it possibly be to the advantage of the disciples that He go away? God has raised up a number of godly men and women in our city who serve many people as spiritual directors, as kind of life coaches, if you will.

Can you imagine one of them saying to the people who depend on their guidance, I'm moving to Toronto and it is for your good that I'm going away.

How can it possibly be to the advantage of the disciples then and now to live in this world without the physical presence of Jesus? How can it possibly be better than having Jesus right here in the room, in His flesh, where He can literally hold on to us and hug us?

[7 : 12] I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. Why? Jesus continues, John 16, 7 again.

For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go away, I will send Him to you. The word rendered Counselor in the text we read is the Greek word parakletos or paraklete. Not parakeet. I used this word paraklete in a sermon one time and afterwards a hard-of-hearing precious parishioner came to me and said, Oh, Pastor, I'm so confused.

I always thought the Holy Spirit was a dove and you kept calling him a parakeet. Paraklete.

P-A-R-A-C-L-E-T-E It is to the advantage of the first disciples and to our advantage that Jesus go away physically.

For when He goes, He sends the paraklete and apparently it is better because of the coming of the paraklete.

[8 : 30] The word is notoriously difficult to render into one simple English word. The King James Bible renders it as comforter.

The NIV and the RSV render it as counselor. The New English Bible, the New Jerusalem Bible, the New RSV, the T-N-I-V render it as advocate. The New American Standard uses the word helper.

In 1960, J.B. Phillips wrote a modern paraphrase and He renders it as someone to stand by you. Now, although that might be a mouthful, it's probably the best we can do.

Someone to stand by you. Paraklete. Someone called inside to stand by you. Para, as in paramedical or paralegal, alongside.

Kletos called. Someone called in alongside. And called in alongside to do a whole lot of things because the verb form of this noun, parakleto, has a wide range of meanings.

[9 : 37] Call in, send for, exhort, encourage, comfort, strengthen, console, convict, convince, and on it goes. In the upper room, Jesus claims that it is for the disciples and for our good that He goes away.

For unless He goes away, the paraklete will not come. But if He goes, He will send the one called in alongside and they and we will not be alone as we follow Jesus in the absence of His physical presence.

Yet, I still ask, how can this be better? How can this be to our advantage? Why is this better than having Jesus physically present?

Because of all the other things Jesus says about the paraklete before John 16, 7. And in particular, I'm thinking of John 14, 16 to 18.

If you open your Bibles again, John 14, 16 to 18. John 14, 16 to 18. Three life-changing verses.

[10 : 53] Listen again. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another paraklete to be with you forever. The Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him for He lives with you and will be in you.

I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Now, I want to highlight just five things Jesus says about the paraklete in John 14, 16 to 18.

First, the paraklete is a person. A person. Jesus always uses personal pronouns when He refers to this one called in alongside.

This is so basic, I know, but it is critical to grasp. The paraklete is a person. Jesus identifies the paraklete as the Spirit.

The Spirit of God. Now, the word for Spirit is the word pneuma. It comes into the English language in words like pneumonia or pneumatic. Now, the word pneuma is a neuter noun.

[12:03] Yet, Jesus never uses neuter pronouns when referring to the Spirit. He always uses masculine pronouns. Jesus breaks the rules of Greek grammar and always uses masculine pronouns referring to this neuter noun.

The point? The paraklete is not an it. We do not speak of the paraklete as an it. The paraklete spirit is not an impersonal force or influence.

The paraklete spirit is a person. And I think this makes all the difference in the adventure of discipleship.

For when we think of the Spirit as an it, we are tempted to manipulate it, to make it work to our advantage.

But when we remember that the paraklete spirit is a person, a he, a you, the tables are turned and now the issue is his purposes and plans.

[13:15] The personhood of the paraklete spirit is lived out in the book of Acts, the story of the early church. Luke, who is the author of Acts, tells us that the Spirit speaks, that he can be lied to, be tempted, he bears witness, he's resisted, he snatches, he gives orders, he sends, he thinks, he forbids, he prevents, he appoints.

The personhood of the Spirit paraklete is also lived out in the New Testament letters. The authors say the paraklete helps us pray, the paraklete searches our hearts, teaches, leads, speaks, predicts, he groans, he can even be grieved.

That is how personal he is. The Spirit Jesus sends in the absence of his physical presence is not a mere force or influence.

The paraklete is as personal as Jesus in whose name he comes. First point. Second thing I want to call to your attention out of John 14, 16 to 18.

Jesus says I will ask the Father and he will give you another paraklete. Another paraklete. This word another is also critical to grasp.

[14:36] You see in the Greek New Testament there are two words that are translated as another. One of them is heteros. Heteros comes into the English language in words like heterogeneous, heterosexual.

Heteros means another of a different kind. But there is also the word alon. And alon means another of the same kind.

And it is that word Jesus uses in the text. The Holy Spirit is another, an alon parakletan. Another of the same kind and not another of a different kind.

parakletan. The question then is who is this first paraklete of whom the Spirit is the same kind? Answer, Jesus himself.

Jesus is the first paraklete. He is the first one called in alongside to comfort, to convince, to counsel, to advocate. And he promises that when he goes away physically he will send another of the same kind.

[15:48] In the absence of Jesus' physical presence another just like Jesus comes. Now why is this so crucial to observe? Because it tells us that the person and work of the Spirit cannot be separated from the person and work of Jesus.

New Testament scholar James Dunn puts it this way. The unity of Jesus and Spirit in personality and mission is neatly expressed by identifying the Spirit as the another paraklete where Jesus is by implication the first paraklete so that the paraklete continues the presence and work of the Son once the Son has departed.

The paraklete continues the work and presence of the Son once the Son has departed. Another of the same kind. That's why Jesus could say to his disciples in the upper room, you know him.

And I can imagine them turning to each other and saying, we do? We do. Yes, because the another has been abiding upon Jesus and in Jesus all the way along.

Jesus, the Spirit came upon Jesus in his baptism. The Spirit led Jesus into his 40 days of testing. It was the Spirit who enabled him to preach the gospel. It was by the Spirit that he cast out demons.

[17:07] The another paraclete has been resting upon Jesus the whole time the disciples have known Jesus. Therefore, when the Spirit comes, they are not meeting a stranger. The paraclete is stamped with the personality of Jesus, another of the same kind.

Now, here's the heart of the matter. The paraclete comes to take the presence of Jesus in his physical absence. But because he is another of the same kind, the presence of the paraclete is the presence of Jesus.

I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. How? In the another. That's why, then, the rest of the New Testament speaks of the Spirit and Jesus in the same breath.

To be in Christ is to be in the Spirit. To be in the Spirit is to be in Christ. To be indwelt by Christ is to be indwelt by the Spirit. To be indwelt by the Spirit is to be indwelt by Christ.

To have Christ make intercession for us is to have the Spirit make intercession for us. Now, the paraclete Spirit is not the paraclete Jesus, yet they cannot be separated in experience.

[18:24] To receive Jesus is to receive the Spirit. To receive the Spirit is to receive Jesus. All on. The Father and I will send you an all on paraclete, another of the same kind.

Are you with me? It gets better. The Father will send. You see, not only can we separate the person and work of the Spirit from the person and work of Jesus, we cannot separate the person and work of the Spirit from the person and work of the Father.

In the upper room discourse, Jesus does not speak of the paraclete without speaking of the Father. Now, the way Jesus speaks implies some kind of distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but the way he speaks also implies some kind of oneness.

So, after promising the another paraclete, Jesus goes on to say this. It's got to be one of the most wonderful verses in the whole Bible. It's John 14, 23.

John 14, 23. Listen. Those who love me will keep my word and my Father will love them. Now, listen.

[19:39] And we will come to them and make our home with them. Did you notice those pronouns? We and our.

We will come to them and we will make our home with them. Theologian Paul Jewett makes the point best. When this other one comes, even though he comes in Jesus' stead, it is also true that his coming is the coming of Jesus and the coming of the Father.

Another paraclete, all on, of the same kind. That's the second point. Third thing I want to call to your attention out of John 14, 16 to 18.

I will ask the Father and he will give you another paraclete to be with you forever. with you forever. Up to this point, the presence of Jesus has been restricted by geography and schedule. If Jesus were in Nazareth, for example, and the disciples down in Jerusalem, Jesus couldn't be with them.

[20:52] In the coming of the another, the presence of Jesus is no longer restricted in those same ways. Michael Green puts it this way. It is the task of the paraclete to universalize the presence of Jesus.

Isn't that great? It's the task of the paraclete to universalize the presence of Jesus. Green continues, In the days of his flesh, Jesus was limited by space and time.

His physical departure made possible the coming of the Spirit as paraclete and there would be no barriers of space and time to prevent disciples being in intimate contact with him.

This means we need not go to Jerusalem, to some sacred shrine to find Jesus. He meets us everywhere we go. It means we need not need to wait for that special day that he used to come to our village, Sunday or Tuesday or Thursday.

He comes to our village every day and stays forever. In the presence of the another, the reality of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, is realized and universal.

[21:58] lies. There is nowhere where you can go where the paraclete is not and therefore where Jesus is not. The paraclete comes and fulfills Jesus' promise, I am with you all the days, everywhere.

Now, as good as that is, it gets better. So the fourth thing I want you to notice in John 14, 16 to 18. I will ask the Father and he will give you another paraclete who will be with you and who will be in you.

In you. In you. In you. It is better because the disciples would find the relationship with Jesus even even closer than the relationship they had with him when he was in the flesh.

Because of this paraclete who comes. He will dwell in you. In. In. In. In. Will you say the word with me so make sure I know that you heard?

[23 : 12] In. Again, please. In. If you belong to Jesus Christ. Then another person. Lives.

In you. In. So the Apostle Paul can say to the believers in the church at Corinth. First Corinthians 3 16.

Do you not know that you he's speaking plural that you are a temple of God and that the spirit of God dwells in you? And then he says in 1 Corinthians 6 19.

Do you not know that your body and now he's speaking in the singular individual believers. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?

And that you are not your own. Now the word translated temple in both of those texts is the word naos. And naos refers not to the whole of the Jerusalem temple.

[24 : 17] Naos refers to the very center of the temple. It refers to the holy of holies. Do you not know that your body is now the holy of holies and that the spirit dwells in you?

I am looking at the most sacred spaces in the universe. Emil Bruner, a Swiss theologian of the 20th century, I think it puts it so powerfully in his work on the apostles creed.

He's commenting on the third article of the apostles creed. I believe in the Holy Spirit. And he writes this. The theme that is before us is none other than that of the God who is present who comes to be the God who is experienced.

Wow, that's a theologian speaking. Theologians don't use the language of experience very often. The theme before us is none other than that of the God who is present who comes to be the God who is experienced.

Bruner continues, whereas the first article of the creed, I believe in God the Father, is concerned with God the Creator. And whereas the second article, I believe in Jesus Christ his Son, is concerned with God entering into history.

[25 : 37] The third article, I believe in the Holy Spirit, is concerned, hear this, that the then becomes today, that the there becomes here, that the without becomes within, that Christ for us becomes Christ in us.

The then becomes today. The there becomes here. The without becomes within. Christ for us becomes Christ in us.

In you. In you. blessed preposition in you we are inhabited people indwelt by another the question is what is he doing in us so we come to the fifth thing I want to highlight from John 14 16 to 18 Jesus speaks of the character of the paraclete and he uses two words holy and true holy spirit and spirit of truth holy and truth these two words are describing the effect of the indwelling paraclete holy we sing the word so often I think we lose touch with its meaning holy means holy other distinct but holy means pure radiantly pure clean the paraclete dwelling alongside with and in us is pure fire and he is working to purify us to cleanse us to free us from all that displeases the father the indwelling paraclete is fulfilling the father's promise you shall be holy for I the lord your god am holy and this explains why although the comforter comes and comforts us the comforter also comes and disturbs us you've probably heard the saying before he comes to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable because he comes and he creates a holy discontent in us discontent in ourselves in our relationships in the church in the world and the paraclete will not rest nor let us rest until this being made holy is accomplished now please note it is the paraclete who makes us holy it's the paraclete who makes us clean not we ourselves we cannot make ourselves holy the paraclete comes to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves and he does it from within this is such a great relief we do not become holy by observing holy rules we become holy by being indwelt with a holy presence oh blessed paraclete it's because you are here that we can become holy we are being transformed from deep inside and I want you also to notice that the holy one comes to livingness while we are still unholy this is the great miracle of grace the holy one who the prophet Habakkuk says is too holy to look on sin takes up residence in unholy sinful people holy indweller in unholy people and spirit of truth three times Jesus calls in the spirit of truth in the upper room who says Jesus will teach us and who will guide us into all truth this is another great relief he dwells in us he teaches us he teaches us the truth he teaches us the truth about ourselves about our world about our relationships about the nature and character of the living God not all at once of course but step by step as we are able to handle the truth in the upper room Jesus said to his disciples I have many more things to say to you but you cannot bear them now he did teach them later as the person of the paraclete came and unfolded more what

Jesus wanted to say the paraclete comes and slowly unfolds the whole truth he is as it were slowly unpeeling an onion layer after layer only in this case as C.S.

[30 : 39] Lewis observed the further in you go the bigger the onion gets until you discover that the inside is actually greater than the whole outside you shall know the truth Jesus promised and the truth will make you free the paraclete comes to live in us to fulfill that promise again what a great relief we are living in times of great confusion and uncertainty we're constantly caught in this cross current of different understandings of what it means to be a human person the spirit of truth is in us and he promises to lead us through all that complexity or bring it closer in into the workplace how often in the workplace do we find ourselves feeling that something's off something is not squaring up something's eccentric it's out of center it's off center and we can't put our finger on it and we wake up at night wrestling with it we wonder why we feel unsettled and sometimes unsafe the spirit of truth is there and he will help us understand what is going on in the workplace or bring it even closer in into family life how often in our family systems do we find ourselves feeling that something's off something's eccentric it's out of center and we're feeling jerked around emotionally we're being manipulated but we can't figure out how and we wrestle we try to understand what it is that's troubling us and the spirit of truth is in us and he starts to unravel the lies and to bring pain healing to the pain bring it even closer in into our own hearts how often do we feel that something's off in our hearts it's off center

Jeremiah the prophet laments the heart is more deceitful than all else who can understand it the paraclete he can understand the heart he knows all the ins and outs of the human heart the conscious and the subconscious he sees through the games we play he sees through the twisted words and the spin doctrine he is in us and he will lead us to freedom you will know the truth and the truth will make you free you see the paraclete loves Jesus who is the truth and his great passion is that we know Jesus in all of his fullness his great passion is that we see Jesus in everything that we do that we read the newspaper in light of Jesus that we surf the internet in light of Jesus that we watch television and movies in light of Jesus that we assess political and social movements in light of Jesus and that we understand the ticking of our own hearts in light of Jesus brothers and sisters the good news is that a teacher has taken up residence in us living inside is the world's greatest theologian and he wants us to live in light of all that Jesus has accomplished for us he will teach us all the benefits of Jesus death he'll teach us all the consequences of Jesus resurrection he'll teach us all the implications of Jesus ascension he's going to teach us to live in light of Jesus coming again holy and true the Holy

Spirit will guide you into all truth let not your hearts be troubled it is to your advantage that I go away really how can that be because says Jesus he sends the another the paraclete a person of the same kind as Jesus who continues Jesus presence with us who comes to live in us and who slowly but surely makes us more and more like the Holy One so that we see everything in light of the truth that is the space in which he now calls us to follow the intimate friendship of the blessed paraclete let us pray you know

Lord that I doubted you when I first heard you say it was to our advantage that you go away but the more I listen to you talk about the paraclete the more I begin to realize that you are right I pray that you would help each one of us learn how to live keenly aware of responsive to the paraclete thank you that you know where we live you know who we are and that you have come to help us live free bless you amen