

Help Is on the Way John 14:16–17 5-21-17

The Spirit is the Help sent from God, but what does help look like? Mother picks up her crying infant boy, holds him close to her and speaks tenderly to him. He falls asleep. A small girl falls learning to ride a bicycle. Dad picks her up and patiently encourages her not to give up. She tries again. Comfort given.

Befriended by a classmate, a student no longer fears bullies or rejection. A graduate's future is full of confusing choices. An older sibling, parent, or teacher offers the wisdom of experience. Comfort.

A therapist encourages and supports a patient relearning to walk after a surgery, stroke, or accident. A Stephen Minister listens to a wife struggling in her marriage who feels ready to give up. She is able to sort out the feelings and focus on what she can control. A penitent reveals to a friend a secret sin that hurts his work and marriage. In God's Word and prayer he is reminded that God still loves Him, forgives his sin, and that with the Spirit's help he can say no to the sin. Comfort.

A widow's grief grows intense as the first anniversary of her loss approaches. Her friend is by her side to listen and help lift the sorrow and weight of loneliness. Comfort given.

Jesus strengthened the grieving, encouraged the disheartened, healed the sick, taught the Scriptures, forgave sins, and prayed for friends.

Now, in our text He is about to leave them, but not as orphans, not without a tutor, a parent, friend, counselor, or encourager. Not without a comforter. For his disciples, Help is on the way in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus call the Spirit Parakleton someone called to help. Luther and others translate it as "Comforter." That is more than one who soothes or calms someone in distress. It is to fortify, make strong, as Jesus did, and as the Helper will do and still does.

Next Sunday we will remember the Ascension of Christ into heaven, which on the calendar would be this Thursday. Ten days later on the day of Pentecost, Jesus sent the promised helper. When He said, "Help is on the way," he meant it.

He promised it for us also. This helper comforts us by enabling us to trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross. There He redeemed us from our sins by His holy blood. He rose from the dead as assurance that He had fully paid the death penalty for all sins. By helping us to believe this, the Spirit Helper brings comfort and strength.

When do we need comfort and strength? When we feel alone, unloved, struggle with keeping God's commands, feel condemned by God's law and judged by the world; when we feel like giving up on hope, or giving in to sin, and when we need guidance on choices and direction for our lives.

Where do we find comfort and strength? Wherever the Helping Spirit of God is doing His helping work. He strengthens faith through the promises of God's Word. The Bible has so many of them that it would be hard not to feel strengthened by reading it often. The word is the Sword of the Spirit, as it arms the believer for spiritual battles against discouragement, temptation, and confusion.

The Word the Spirit gave Peter is that baptism saves us as an appeal of a good conscience before God. Peter preached on Pentecost that in baptism God forgives our sins and gives us the Holy Spirit. By Spirit given faith, we relive our baptism when we confess our sins and depart with a clear conscience. This guards us against the condemnation of Satan, from others and ourselves. At the font, where God adopted you as His son or daughter, he made sure you were no orphan.

The Spirit reminds us in the words that Jesus spoke to sanctify the Passover bread and wine, that He is present with us to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. We eat and drink of the blessed Sacrament believing that promise.

The Spirit also helps us to pray, even when we don't know what to say. He reminds us that Jesus taught us to pray as dear children to their dear Father.

And as our opening examples illustrate, the Spirit lives in us with his many gifts. In our various vocations, He enables us to comfort and strengthen each other as parent, spouse, friend, or whatever opportunity we have to be a helper.

Surely, the only way you will not find God's help is if you don't ask for it. When you need it, ask God for it, then be wherever His helping Spirit is at work. Although Christ has risen from the grave and ascended to heaven, He has not left us. For us, the promise is not, "Help is on the way", but rather, Help is here! Help for you, for me, Forever. Amen.