

“The Holy Spirit Will Teach You Everything”
John 14:23-29
Sunday, May 1, 2016
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

There’s a cartoon about a man lying on a psychiatrist’s couch. When the psychiatrist asks the client what his problem is, he confides that he has all kinds of fears about the future. “Doctor,” he begins, “I’m worried about the energy crisis, inflation, the situation in the Middle East, political and social upheaval in Africa, our diplomatic relations with China ...” The list goes on and on; I can’t remember all of the man’s concerns; there are at least a dozen. In the final frame the psychiatrist responds, “Shut up and move over,” after which he proceeds to get on the couch with the patient.

I. The Holy Spirit is like a baby sitter.

Today’s gospel reading is a part of the Farewell Discourses of Jesus, chapters 13 through 17 in the book of John. In these discourses, set during the Last Supper, Jesus teaches and comforts his disciples, in an attempt to prepare them for his death. He gently tells them he is leaving, but that “...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach [them] everything, and remind [them] of all that [He] has said to [them].” The Holy Spirit will teach them, and the Holy Spirit will remind them of everything that Jesus has taught them. The Holy Spirit will remind them of everything Jesus has done in his earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit will remind them of everything Jesus has meant to them.

James Somerville offers a unique illustration of how the Holy Spirit works:

“When my wife puts her hand on the doorknob,” writes Somerville, “her coat over her arm, my children look up from what they are doing to ask: ‘Who will take care of us?’ and she

gives them the name of one of their regular babysitters. All of them are capable, and my children enjoy the attention, but if my wife gives them one name – ‘Brittain’ -- my children leap up from what they are doing and rejoice. Brittain reads to them, romps with them, acts out plays and makes chocolate chip cookies; she nurtures their young lives like a loving parent, and as long as she is with them they are not afraid.

“I don’t know that the Holy Spirit has ever been compared to a babysitter. But if you can imagine Jesus as a mother, then it may not be so hard to imagine the Spirit in this other role, as one who cares for the church in the interim between Jesus’ departure and return, as one who comforts, teaches, reminds and, yes, sometimes even romps with the sons and daughters of God.”

“In the words of Jesus then, ‘Rejoice!’” (as quoted by Brian Stoffregen)

We want to rejoice, don’t we? We want to romp with the Holy Spirit. We want to receive the comfort and the teachings and the reminders of Jesus’ presence with us.

But life can drag us down at times, can’t it? Like the man on the psychiatrist’s couch – and the psychiatrist, himself – we begin to feel that our list of fears and worries and sufferings is so long nothing can help.

When we despair in that way, we cut ourselves off from the very help that Jesus promises – the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, sent from our Father, who loves us so much he sent his only Son to live among us and to die for our sakes and to be raised again, in final victory over sin and death.

Yes, there are times of suffering and grief. Yes, we face challenges. Just as the disciples did. But we do not have to face any of it alone. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit’s presence, particularly within the fellowship of the church. We are not alone.

A professor once said, “You Americans are so spoiled. You think that suffering is bad. That is not always true. Suffering is never comfortable but in this world it is unavoidable, and sometimes, if you face it rightly, it can even be beneficial. Nietzsche was playing with truth when he said, ‘What ever does not kill us makes us stronger.’ Suffering becomes destructive when it drives a person into one’s self isolating them from God and those they love. But suffering can also be positive if faith and love create the power to overcome it. The heroes and heroines of history are not those who took it easy, who had it good, but those who struggled and who overcame seemingly insurmountable odds.” (as quoted by John M. Braaten)

If we open our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit; if we open our lives to the community of the church; if we share our faith and our love with one another, we are never alone. Through the power of Christ we can overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. We can overcome all things in Christ, who strengthens us.

II. The Holy Spirit is like a papa bear.

Here’s another wonderful image of how the Holy Spirit works:

“There was a nature show on television about a black bear that gave birth to two cubs. One cub died right away. Three weeks later the mother died and the remaining cub was left to fend for itself. An orphaned cub in that condition is like a walking buffet for predators. And of course the camera immediately showed a hungry-looking mountain lion.

“One day the orphan cub encountered a giant male black bear. The little cub cowered at the bear’s sheer mass. The larger bear peered around and seemed to realize that the mother bear wasn’t anywhere to be found. He gave the little cub a friendly nudge. The camera then showed the little bear happily trailing along after the larger one. The adoption papers were signed, sealed

and registered at the county seat in that nudge. Papa bear proceeded to show the cub how to grub for insects and how to catch fish and how to scratch his back against a tree.

“One day the two bears became separated. The cub began to cry and looked frantically for his new father, but couldn't find him anywhere. The cub approached a stream where he'd learned to fish and something caught his attention. He looked up to see a mountain lion ready to pounce. That same mountain lion had stalked the cub for the entire show. There was no way that mountain lion would've gone for that cub with Papa bear around, but now....

“The camera zoomed in on the cub. He automatically mimicked the posture of his adopted father when threatened. He stood on his hind legs and bared his teeth. Then, in exactly the same way his new father would have done, this cub let loose a mighty growl that should have reverberated throughout the forest. But, only a tiny bear cub squeak came out.

“Well, you know what was coming. But, to everybody's astonishment the mountain lion lowered his head and ran off in the opposite direction.

“The camera panned back to the proud little cub still standing tall on his hind legs. And then all the viewers saw what that little cub Could Not: a few yards behind him, at full, ferocious height, his sharp, white teeth bared in a snarl, stood Daddy bear. He may not have made a sound, but he was there.

“And even though the cub couldn't see his father, his father stood guard, protecting his young. The little cub had power available greater than anything he could produce on his own. There was a greater power watching over him.” (Billy D. Strayhorn).

Closing

“...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I

do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Like a papa bear or a babysitter, the Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us how to live. The Holy Spirit comforts us and romps with us. The Holy Spirit is present, even when we don't notice it's there. The Holy Spirit protects us when we are in dire circumstances. We may feel like we are alone, especially in those dark and despairing times in life...just like the disciples, who felt alone in the shadow of the cross.

Martin Luther once said: “Can a rock that has been in the sunlight all day not fail to give off warmth and heat at night?”

Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, to give warmth and heat, even in the coldest, darkest night.

May you always stay close to the light of Christ, basking in the warmth of his Holy Spirit. May you always remain in the fellowship of the Church, sharing in the abundance of the Table Jesus has prepared for you.

Amen.