

Who is the Holy Spirit? How would you answer that question? Maybe you would point to the creeds, like the Nicene Creed which says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son," and so forth. And that would be absolutely true. After all, the creeds are meant to give us the basics of what it is that we believe. But if I were then to ask you, "What does that mean for how you live your daily lives?", how would you answer that question? How does knowing who the Holy Spirit is change how you live as Christians? I suspect that question is a lot more difficult to answer. We have the truth. That seems simple enough. But to apply that truth to ourselves is not always easy. And yet, as we will see today and also next week at Pentecost, knowing who the Holy Spirit is impacts how we live as Christians in our daily lives.

Because Jesus points us to the Holy Spirit in our Gospel reading for today when he says in verse 26: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." And it's actually pretty remarkable how much this one verse teaches us about the Holy Spirit. As one pastor put it, we learn more about the Spirit in this one verse than in any other verse in the Bible. Because first of all, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Helper. The original word there, which we sometimes use in our hymns is "Paraclete." A paraclete is someone who is called to assist somebody else. So someone who speaks for someone else, for example, or someone who speaks to someone else to guide them, to encourage them, to comfort them, whatever it may be. Picture somebody standing by your side who speaks for you and who also speaks to you to guide you through life. That's what we mean by paraclete. Now, translating paraclete, we can use the word "helper." That's a good translation. A helper is someone who helps you by either speaking for you or who helps you by speaking to you. It's a good way to look at it. Other ways to translate paraclete would be "comforter," one who comforts you by guiding you. Or you could even translate it as "advocate." A paraclete could be a defense lawyer who is speaking on your behalf in court. All of those are good ways to translate that word "paraclete," and all of them help us to understand who the Holy Spirit is: one who helps us, one who comforts us, one who speaks for us.

And that title "paraclete" is so meaningful for us, Christians. It's so meaningful for how we live. Because Jesus in John chapters 15 and 16 is talking about the hatred of the world. The disciples were about to go into a period of time where they would face a lot of difficulties. Jesus says in John 15, verse 18: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." They were going to be put out of the synagogues, even killed for following after Jesus. And Christians, we also face this same hatred of the world, even if our lives are not in danger. And the reason for that is that the world is convinced that it is good. The world is convinced that it is righteous, that it is moral, that it is always doing the right thing. But Jesus comes along and shows them otherwise. He shows the truth that the world is, in fact, evil and that its works are full of darkness. And the world hates him because of it. And the world also hates those who belong to him because of it. The world says to us: "How can you say that what I am doing is wrong? Who are you to say that to me? You are the one who is hateful. You are the one who is evil. I'm always doing the right thing. I'm always doing the most loving thing that I possibly can." And so the world does everything that it can to silence us, to silence the voice of Christ even through the media or through the law. All so that it doesn't have to listen to what Jesus has to say. And if we're not ready for that, Christians, it's going to be very difficult for us, especially when the pressure upon us is very great. And what can make that even more difficult is that it may seem like we're alone in this. That God is off far away somewhere, and we're down here on our own,

trying to get through this as best as we can. How can we face the hostility of the world if we're doing it on our own?

But we're not alone, Christians. The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, our Helper is with us. He is standing with us. He is speaking for us. He is speaking to us. He is strengthening us through all of these things. And knowing this prepares us for what is to come. When we know who the Holy Spirit is as our Helper, we can face the very worst that the world has to throw at us, because we are not alone.

Jesus again says in verse 26: "Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father." Jesus shows us here that the Holy Spirit is a "who" and not a "what." He says, "Whom I will send." And that's important because there is this temptation to see the Spirit as something impersonal, to think of the Spirit as something like a force or an influence. Kind of like the wind, right? The wind is not a living thing, but it blows around, it goes here and there, and it pushes things around. That's not who the Holy Spirit is. Or worse, we might think of the Holy Spirit as a feeling. That when I feel a certain way, I know that I have the Spirit with me, even though our feelings change all of the time.

No, the Holy Spirit is a "who." The term that we often used to describe that is that he is a "Person." Now, we are talking about God here and about who God is, so we need to be very careful. But when we talk about the Holy Spirit in this way, what we mean is this: the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the holy Trinity. And by "Person," we mean that each Person of the Trinity is distinct from one another. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and the Spirit is distinct from both of them. They are as distinct from one another as we are from each other. I am not you, you are not me, and so forth. And yet these three Persons are one God. As we say in the Athanasian Creed, there are not three gods, but one God. And what all of this shows us, then, is that the Holy Spirit is God. He is the Lord.

And Jesus also tells us a little bit about the relationship between the three Persons here. In the Bible, for example, we say that the Son is begotten from the Father. In other words, the relationship between the Father and the Son is compared to the relationship between a father and a son. Although what that means exactly for God is beyond our ability to understand. And likewise, here we see that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. "Proceeds" here meaning to go out from or to come forth from. It's like Ezekiel 47 where the water is described as coming out from the temple. It's the same word used there as used here. But again what that means exactly for the Holy Spirit is beyond our ability to understand. We're simply using the words that the Bible uses. So the Spirit, then, goes out from the Father and the Son, and he is sent to us.

Now, hold on a second! we might say. This all seems kind of confusing. This is very technical. It seems like there's a lot of detail there. What could that mean for our daily lives? How could this help us live as Christians? But it is so very helpful, Christians! Because it shows us that the Helper, the Paraclete, is no ordinary helper. He is not a force or an influence, as if we just needed a little nudge to help us along. He is not a feeling, as if our feelings would be good enough to help us stand against the world. He is not even an angel or something else, even though the angels watch over us. No, what all of these things show us is that he is God. God himself is with us. The Holy Spirit is God, and he is your Helper! God stands by you. God speaks for you. God

speaks to you. The same God who created all things, who upholds the whole universe with his power, this God helps you through everything that you have to face. And what a tremendous comfort it is to know that God himself is with us in the trenches when we suffer for him! That's what all of this has to show us.

The last thing that Jesus tells us here about the Spirit in verse 26 is that "he will bear witness about me." In other words, when the Spirit speaks, he points to Jesus. He speaks about him and about the truth which is in him. And on the one hand, the Spirit speaks to us, leading us into that truth. As Jesus says in chapter 16, verse 13: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." So in other words, through the Spirit we come to know the truth. We come to know Jesus Christ, and by knowing Jesus Christ, we are saved. The Spirit speaks to us.

But on the other hand, the Spirit also speaks to the world. Jesus again says, chapter 16, verse 8: "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." Which means that when the Spirit speaks to the world, he is still upholding the words and the works of Jesus. He is still showing Jesus to the world, so the world would know its own sin. So that the world would see that its works are evil, that it might turn from them and turn to Jesus Christ. And as long as we are waiting until the Last Day, the Spirit will continue to bear witness to the work of Jesus. He will continue to confront the world and to bear witness in that way. We see him at work in both of those ways: speaking to us and also speaking to the world.

And Jesus himself shows us what this means for our daily lives when he says in the next verse, verse 27: "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." So, just as the Spirit bears witness, Christians, we also bear witness, pointing to Jesus in our words and in our actions, just as the Spirit is doing. And what that means for our daily lives is that when we speak of Jesus to the world, we're not doing so on our own. The Spirit is speaking through us. Whenever we speak of Jesus, the Spirit is also speaking. Just as Jesus says, Matthew chapter 10: "For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." So we don't need to worry, then, when we speak to the world about Jesus. We don't need to be afraid of what the world is going to do to us when we tell of what Jesus has done, because the Spirit is also speaking, using us to bear witness to the world.

So in all of these things, then, Christians, we can see how the Spirit comforts us. And next week we will learn more about who the Spirit is and what that means for our daily lives, but now we can see how this helps us now. Because the Holy Spirit is the Helper. He is the Paraclete. And he helps us through all of these things. The Holy Spirit is God. God Almighty is our helper in the face of a hostile world. The Holy Spirit bears witness, and he speaks through us about Jesus Christ to the world. And knowing all of these things means that we can face a hostile world. Knowing all of these things means we can face whatever may happen, because the Holy Spirit is with us through it all. The Holy Spirit is God, Christians, and he is with us always to the end of the world.

Let us pray. Come, Holy Spirit, light divine, our mighty Helper, the living Paraclete! Shine upon our hearts this day, and strengthen us to face the hostility of the world, so that we may bear

witness to Jesus Christ through all that we say and do; for you live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, now and forever. Amen.