

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Day of Pentecost, May 15, 2016

A Divine Gift

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

May 15, 2016

John 14:8-17, 25-27

One of my Bible commentaries comments that preaching on anything from John 14 to 17 is easier said than done saying that its phrases invite the hearer to boredom.

In the original Greek these parts of John's Gospel are said to be tolerable but in translation to English, not so much so.

John Calvin's solution to the problem was to say that every literate Christian should be taught Greek. That would presumably solve the problem but obviously is rather impractical so I instead will try this morning to make sense out of portions of John 14 in English and hopefully keep them from being boring to you.

Our scripture reading is about a divine gift given to all of us. That gift, in Greek, is *parakletos*. In English it is often written as *paraclete*, a word which really doesn't have a clear translation into English. Some Bible translations use the word "*Counselor*". Others use "*Advocate*" as does our pew Bible. The King James Bible uses the word "*Comforter*" and the Good News Bible uses "*Helper*". The Message calls the Paraclete "*Friend*".

Counselor, Advocate, Comforter, Helper, Friend --- those words all have different meanings to us. Advocate tends to suggest a lawyer --- someone who stands up and fights for us in court. A helper is one who lends us a hand in whatever we try to do. A comforter is available to give us a shoulder to cry on when we are experiencing stress. A counselor gives us advice and helps us to sort out whatever is on our mind. A friend is with us in good times and bad. Yes defining the Paraclete is difficult to do precisely and in our scripture reading Jesus is trying to explain it to the disciples. He is trying to explain a divine gift --- the Holy Spirit --- and he is having trouble making them understand. Can you define the Holy Spirit precisely? I don't think so.

We talk about the three parts of the Godhead, another difficult word to define --- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- one God in three parts -- the Trinity. Try to

explain that. It is difficult.

That was Philip's problem in our scripture reading. He asks Jesus to show the Father to the disciples. He wants to see God with his own eyes. If he can see, he will believe. He will be satisfied.

Jesus responds that whoever has seen him has seen the Father. *"Seeing, believing, and knowing God are all based on the concrete, physical works that Jesus has done in Philip's presence."* (Preaching John, Lamar Williamson, Jr., Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2004).

Jesus says, *"If you cannot believe that I am with God as a metaphysical proposition, you can at least believe me for who I am, because the remarkable things I do show that I am in the Father and the Father is in me ...' The kind of knowing of which Jesus speaks springs from seeing with the eyes of faith."* (ibid).

Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to the Father but that the Paraclete, the divine gift, is coming to be with them until he returns. The divine gift is the Holy Spirit which will reside with them, which will teach them, which will dwell within them, and which will be a living link to Jesus. He says that the world will no longer see him but they will. The third part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the divine gift, will remain with them and be present and among all believers.

The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism and Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now he is promising his followers that when he ascends to heaven, they will receive the divine gift of the Holy Spirit. His ascension is the precondition for them to receive this divine gift. They are promised that when they do receive this gift, they will be enabled to continue the work of Jesus and to do even greater works; they will be heard and their prayers will be answered to meet the needs of what they have to do; and they will be accompanied in their life and mission in the world by the Spirit. Unlike Jesus who is departing, the Spirit will be with them forever. (Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year C, paraphrased, Fred B. Craddock, et al, Trinity Press, Valley Forge, PA, 1994).

This promise of Christ came to pass at Pentecost, 50 days after his resurrection and ten days after his ascension. The Holy Spirit descended with noise and tongues of fire and people began to speak in other languages. The Holy Spirit remains with us

today. Unfortunately very few of us today can speak in other languages but some can and I envy them. I can speak bits and pieces of a number of languages, just enough to make a fool of myself unlike a friend in the Netherlands who could speak at least 12 languages fluently. Speaking in tongues was a necessity for the apostles but is not for us, at least not many of us.

However the promise which Jesus made to the disciples was a promise to us as well. We and believers everywhere are also recipients of the divine gift of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia. Amen.

