

Another Advocate

John 14:15-21

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Lansdowne UMC

Did you ever see the show Mythbusters? The premise is that special effects experts rig up scenarios to test various Myths. Will a cell phone used near a gas pump cause an explosion? Can a human hang onto the roof of a speeding car? Does a car explode when driving off a cliff? Something usually ends up blowing up. And even if it doesn't, they usually blow it up. Obviously they worry about safety and have only had a few well-publicized catastrophic accidents.

One episode I remember watching a long time ago involved escaping from a car that had plunged into a large body of water. As it turns out, the pressure of the water that's on the outside of the car is so great, that almost immediately after the car hits the water, it's impossible to open the car door. I know, it's horrifying. So as host Adam Savage sits in this car that plunges into the water, he has to wait until the inside completely fills up with water before the pressure has equalized and he's able to open the door. Pretty scary. Pretty cool. He has a scuba diver in car with him in case he needs to take a breath before he escapes.

Well, several years later, they redo the experiment, adding the even more horrifying twist that the car has flipped on its roof before landing in the water. Adam Savage would later describe this as the scariest experience he had on the show. While they're doing the test, the car actually flips several more times with Adam in it. He gets disoriented to the point where he can't even remember if he's in the front seat or the

back seat. He doesn't know which end is up. Adding insult to injury, the car they were using had belonged to a smoker, and when prepping the car, they apparently hadn't fully cleaned out the ashes. So as soon as Adam opens his eyes underwater, his eyes burn and he can't see anything. He's disoriented, so he can't get to any of the doors to get out. He runs out of breath. Just at that moment, he reaches out and a dive regulator is placed in his hand. He puts it to his mouth and takes his breath. With air in lungs, he is able to think clearly, orient himself, and escape the sinking car.

Jamie, Adam's co-host is standing far above him. At any point, he could send a team of divers in to break the car windows and pull Adam out. His life is ultimately not in danger. But I'm sure that everyone on the set that day was glad that there was a diver who came alongside Adam and gave him the air he needed.

Before Jesus is crucified, he says to his disciples that he's going to go away. In hindsight it's clear that he's talking both about how he was die and how he'll ascend to heaven after he's risen from the dead. Imagine what it might have been like to be a disciple of Jesus. You've thrown your whole life away to find a new life in Jesus. And now Jesus tells you he's going to leave you. I imagine it might have been a little bit like riding in a car that had plunged into water. Before it happens, it's something you're afraid could happen. (If you weren't before... oops, sorry). And then once it happens, it's incredibly disorienting. And it doesn't take long before you feel like you're drowning.

But this is what Jesus says to his disciples in John 14:16: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

Jesus is leaving, but he will send to his disciples another Advocate who will not leave them.

The word Advocate is one translation of the Greek word *paracletos*, or Paraclete. But there have been a number of translations, all of which, I believe, show a different facet of who this Paraclete is for Christians. In addition to Advocate, we also have Companion, Comforter, Consoler, Counselor, Exhorter, Friend, Helper, and probably others. Some bible translators just want to keep the word intact and translate Jesus saying “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete.”

Literally the word means “one who is called alongside,” or “one who is called to someone’s aid.” The Paraclete is the one who the producers of the show put in the car with you so that you’re not alone. The Paraclete is the one who is called alongside you and called to aid you in your times of need. A few verses past the end of our reading, in verse 26, he says, “the Advocate, 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.” The Paraclete is the Holy Spirit, whom the church comes to understand as a person (not simply a force), who is as much God as the Father and the Son. One God who is eternally three persons. That’s the Trinity.

Let’s use a few of these terms to explore different aspects of who the Paraclete is. Let’s take Advocate first. An Advocate is someone who comes alongside someone who stands accused-- someone who is *for* you, on your side, and who speaks the truth to someone that has what you need. An Advocate of the poor seeks healthcare, food, homes, and jobs, from those who might give them. An Advocate before a judge

advocates for justice. My son will sometimes call an Advocate to his aid when he wants another piece of chocolate cake and Dad isn't so sure that's a good idea.

So the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is an Advocate. But Jesus says more than that. He says that he will ask his Father to send *another* Advocate. Another Advocate? Well, who's the first Advocate? Clearly it's Jesus himself. He's the one who pleads the case of his disciples to the Father. Outside of this section of John's Gospel, the only other time that the word Paraclete is used is in 1 John, one of the Gospel-writer's letters. In 1 John 2:1-2, he says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate [a paraclete!] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

When Jesus was raised from the dead, he still appears to be one who was crucified. He has holes in his hands, his feet, and his side. And when he ascends into heaven, his crucified presence is constantly advocating for those who sin. He's constantly saying, "save my sister, save my brother... you sent me to die for them." John says, "don't sin.... But if you do sin, know that you've got an Advocate with the Father."

So how is the Holy Spirit an Advocate? There are lots of ways to think about this. But going back to our Mythbusters image.... Co-host Jamie is standing on dry ground. He knows that at any moment, the scuba divers could be dispatched to save Adam, whose near drowning. But, as it seems like an eternity goes by with no rescue, the diver in the car is able to provide a breath and remind Adam that ultimately, he's safe.

What am I saying? Jesus is pleading our case in heaven. If we put our trust in Jesus, who was crucified and raised from the dead for us, then we're going to be fine. But it doesn't always seem like that. We can't see what's going on above water, so to speak. So the Holy Spirit is the riding alongside us to advocate *to* us that God isn't going to let us drown. Put another way, Jesus is an external Advocate while the Paraclete is an internal advocate. The Holy Spirit says, "I know this whole bit about Jesus ascending into heaven and advocating your case before the Father is difficult to wrap your head around. I'm going to give you the peace that passes all understanding. I'm going to witness together with your spirit that you're a child of God. I'm going to reveal Jesus to you in a new light"

The Holy Spirit does reveal Jesus in a new light. The Spirit is like a bright light shining on who Jesus is and what Jesus does. Without the activity of the abiding, indwelling Holy Spirit, we're not so sure about who Jesus is. But when we put our trust in Jesus and believe that God raised him from the dead, Jesus says, "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you." In other words, Jesus says, you'll know that I am who I say I am, and you'll know that you and I will remain together, through thick and thin. When you have a resurrection faith, I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit to be with you forever.

Another way that some have translated Paraclete is as "Comforter." Jesus knew that his disciples were going to be sad at his departure, so he asks his Father to send the Spirit, almost as a way of making Jesus' bodily absence bearable. Most of us here weren't around 2000 years ago.

We didn't get to meet the risen Jesus. Well, the Paraclete is the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples that they'll know the Spirit because the Spirit has already been at work among them. But the Spirit isn't going to just keep swimming outside the car, so to speak. The Spirit is going to get into your car to comfort you in the trials of life. Jesus says "You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be *in* you." The Spirit is initially one who is along side us, helping us (more on that in a second). But the Spirit is going to come to make his home in the disciples. The Spirit is getting into the car.

Finally then, the Paraclete, in addition to being an advocate and a comforter, is also a helper. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the power to confess Jesus as Lord, to obey his commands, and to love him. But doesn't Jesus say that he sends the Holy Spirit to those who love Jesus and obey his commands. I've got to be careful here not to jump too deep down the rabbit hole, but it seems a little circular doesn't it? Jesus sends the Spirit when we love him and obey him. But the Spirit is the one who helps us to love and obey Jesus.

Saint Augustine, one of the greatest minds of church history makes this insight: "without the Holy Spirit, we can neither love Christ nor keep His commandments... the less experience we have of His presence, the less also can we do so; and the fuller our experience, so much the greater our ability." The Paraclete is our Helper. If there's any calling Jesus Lord going on, any acts of obedience, or any love, that is the Holy Spirit at work, helping us to believe, obey, and love. The Spirit helps us to obey Jesus commands, whether in a small amount, for those who have only a little experience with the Spirit, or in a greater amount, for those who have received from God a fuller experience of the Spirit.

So here we are in the easter season, bookended by Easter on one end and then Pentecost 50 days later on the other end. As our church year retells the story of Jesus, Jesus has been raised from the dead and has been appearing to the disciples. Bit by bit they've been coming to resurrection faith. Jesus will soon ascend to heaven, leaving us in an in-between period in the Christian experience. As disciples, we believe Jesus has been raised from the dead. Nevertheless, we're still waiting for Jesus to deliver on the fullness of the promise of the Holy Spirit. Like Mary on Easter Sunday, we want to hold on to the risen Jesus. But we can't. He has to ascend to the Father so that the Spirit can come in fullness on Pentecost. Jesus actually says later that it's *better* if he leaves, so that the Paraclete can come.

I recognize that for many of us, this all sounds very abstract. Perhaps you are a person who does not experience the Advocating, Helping, Comforting presence of the indwelling Spirit. Maybe you're like one of the disciples in between Easter and Pentecost. You have resurrection faith, but you're waiting for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. A very popular and helpful theologian and bible commentator from the mid 20th century, William Barclay, makes this observation, "we cannot receive the Holy Spirit unless we wait in expectation and in prayer for him to come to us." We don't get a breath of air from the person at our side until we put our hand out to ask for it. Pentecost doesn't come automatically. It comes through asking through prayer, and waiting expectantly.