

*Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'*⁶ *Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.*⁷ *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*⁸ *When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:*⁹ *in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;*¹⁰ *in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;*¹¹ *and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:5-11)*

What Comfort is there in This?

When I was a kid, we used to go to an ice cream and sandwich place called Ferrell's. It was a 1920's themed place in a mall in South Bend, Indiana. One summer day, we went there for lunch. My mom got a sandwich and as she started to eat it, she suddenly put it down. She waved for our waitress to come over and very calmly, she showed her that there was a worm in the lettuce. Now, my parents have owned restaurants, so they're pretty realistic about this stuff. All my mom really wanted was a new sandwich. But this waitress shouted across the packed restaurant, "There's a worm in this lady's lettuce!" Now, I was maybe nine or ten, so I thought the whole thing was very entertaining. But my mom noticed something different. First of all, she saw the manager march that girl into a corner and yell at her for not being more discrete. And my mom also noticed the lady at the table next to us turning a little green and putting her sandwich down and not taking another bite.

What are the odds that her sandwich also had a worm in it? They're really pretty small. The other lady could've inspected her sandwich and seen that there was no worm in it. Yes, she had eaten part of it already and yes, it is possible that she ate a worm without knowing it. But if she did, it was too late to do anything about it. What harm could come from eating the rest of the sandwich once you were sure there were no more worms? But I don't think she took much comfort in that line of reasoning. Sometimes, logic doesn't help us much with our feelings. Today is the Festival of Pentecost. In our gospel lesson, we hear Jesus giving reasons for his upcoming departure. He was going to leave his disciples and he was telling them why that was a good thing. But I wonder how they felt about his reasons at that moment. I wonder how we feel about them. My friends, when we consider what Jesus has to say, **what comfort is there in this?**

I.

To answer that question we need to understand what Jesus was saying. To do that, we need to know that he said this the night before he died. It was part of a long conversation Jesus had with his disciples that night. It started in the upper room after the Passover meal and continued as they walked through the dark streets toward the Garden of Gethsemane. As they walked along, Jesus said, "**Now I am going to him who sent me.**" When he first started talking about leaving them, they didn't seem to understand. But now, he says, "**Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.**" They were beginning to see that he was going to die the next day. They were going to lose the intimate relationship they had enjoyed for the last three years and that hurt. So Jesus offered them comfort by explaining why it had to be this way. So, **what comfort is there in Jesus sending the Holy Spirit?**

That's the point Jesus made. He said, "**I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**" Of course, Jesus was now reaching past the horror that they would experience the next day when he died. Jesus knew that by this time Sunday, he would be alive again and he knew they would know it. He knew that he would spend the forty days that followed coming to them over and over again. But on Ascension Day Jesus was going to leave them for good – at least for this life.

What is it that hurts when someone we love dies? It's the separation and loss, isn't it? We don't get to see that person. We don't get to tell them what happened to us today. We don't get to enjoy just being with them anymore. Sometimes, even in this life, if we're separated from someone it hurts like they died. Even though Jesus would be alive and even be with them, they weren't going to see him like they had before. That separation and loss would hurt.

But it was necessary. According to God's plan, Jesus came and did his work. Then he returned to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit on the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost to do his work. That began the

final age of the Church's existence. The world entered the last days, the days of preaching the gospel. The marching orders were clear: share the gospel in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. My friends, where are we relative to Jerusalem but the uttermost ends of the earth?

The comfort Jesus offered his disciples is also the comfort he offers us. Yes, he is with us every day of our lives. Yes, he promises to work through us and in us. But we don't get to see him. What we often do see is pain and sorrow. What we often do see is the Church in retreat. On Friday, my son said to me, "I don't really appreciate Google's gay pride thing." If you used Google on Friday, you know they were doing a tribute to a gay rights pioneer. But when was the last time they did a tribute to any Christian figure? They don't put Martin Luther's picture up on his birthday. They don't put Jesus' picture up on his birthday, or his death day or even his resurrection day. Islam is on track to become larger than Christianity by the end of this century. What will that mean for our children and our grandchildren? How many times haven't we wished Jesus would just come back? How often don't we wish that we could just see him and talk to him and find out what he's doing? We need the comfort Jesus offers here.

We have it. Jesus left to send the Holy Spirit to us. He calls him "the Counselor." The Greek word is a little hard to translate. Sometimes people leave it untranslated and call him "the Paraclete." But many translations say something like "the Helper" or "the Advocate." I personally like that last one, because this word does sometimes refer to a person's lawyer. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, comes. He works through the gospel and changes our status before God. It isn't just the world that's sinful. We are, too. Left to ourselves, the only verdict God's court could ever render about us is guilty. We deserve his punishment. We earn it every day. But Jesus died and paid and then he rose for all those sins. The Holy Spirit gave us faith in Christ. Now, in God's courtroom, God declares that we're as innocent as Jesus was. All our punishment has been suffered so there's nothing left for us to pay. Jesus left so that he could send the Spirit to us with that good news. He sent him to comfort us every day that we struggle with our own sin. He sent him to comfort us every day that life hurts and other people's sin makes our lives harder. He sent him to work through the gospel and ease our pain and focus us on the blessings to come. There is great comfort in that.

II.

But Jesus only spends a moment on that point today. He goes on to say something harder: "**When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.**" That is part of the why it's good for us that Jesus has visibly gone away. But how is that the case? How does it make us feel better about living in this world? **What comfort is there in the Holy Spirit convicting the world?**

Maybe we should ask what Jesus means by this statement. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convict the world in regard to sin because people don't believe in him. That really zeroes us in on what Jesus is talking about. The Holy Spirit works through the word. The word has two parts, the law and the gospel. The purpose of both is to get us to heaven. God accuses us of sin and even makes us feel guilty. But he's not a manipulator who likes making us feel bad or who uses guilt to control us. God uses guilt to make us see that we need a Savior. He makes us admit all the sinful things we've done and all the good things we haven't done so that we can't make excuses for ourselves anymore. But he doesn't enjoy our guilt. He enjoys setting us free. That's what the good news does. Jesus died and he rose and all our sin is gone. God sends pastors not to drive you deeper and deeper into guilt but to set you free.

The Holy Spirit's greatest work is to unlock the chains of guilt that drag us down into despair and self-destructive behavior. So much of our bad behavior, so many of our bad choices come because we're trying to silence our consciences. God knows that when he frees us from the guilt, often, he frees us from the bad behavior, too. But when people refuse to listen to the gospel message, when they reject the freedom that Jesus has given them, then the Holy Spirit's job is to convict them. So really, the only sin that actually sends us to hell is unbelief. And sadly, the world is full of unbelievers. The Holy Spirit announces through us that they will all go to hell.

Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit convicts the world in regard to righteousness because he is going to the Father where we don't get to see him anymore. His point is really the same. The only way that anyone gets to be righteous in God's sight is through faith in Christ. Jesus obeyed God's law perfectly in our place. When we trust that he did that, God counts what Jesus did as ours, so believers stand before God as righteous. But unbelievers stand before God as guilty of all that they've ever done. Since they dismiss a Christ they cannot see, the Holy Spirit convicts them of guilt.

Finally Jesus said that the Holy Spirit convicts the world in regard to judgment because the Prince of the World now stands condemned. Who is the Prince of this World? It's the devil, right? He's been at war with God since the Garden of Eden. He promised Adam and Even that they wouldn't die if they ate of the Tree of Knowledge but instead, they would be like God. He lied and he recruited them into his kingdom, at least temporarily. But the devil lost when Jesus died and rose. The devil's kingdom was destroyed and he himself will spend eternity suffering in hell. Everyone who rejects Jesus is part of the devil's kingdom. In the end, they will all join him in hell.

The Holy Spirit's job is to announce that condemnation to the whole world. How is that a comfort to us? In part, it comforts us because in the end, we will be vindicated. Christians spend their whole lives telling people things that just don't seem like they could ever be true: a dead man lives. Sinners are perfect. Suffering is a blessing. Jesus is with us. Much of the world finds that to be utter nonsense. If you don't think so, just poke around on the internet for a while. For \$8.48 you can buy a "Christianity is Stupid" tee shirt. You can find a Pew Study that says that unlike all other religions, Christians fail their religious knowledge test. You can find lots of websites that ridicule our beliefs and the faith that leads us to hold those beliefs. Sometimes, it's hard to live in a world where that keeps happening. We may even struggle because we don't answers to all the questions those websites pose. So the idea that on Judgment Day, the whole world will see the truth of what we believe is very comforting.

But it isn't just on Judgment Day that Jesus is talking about. The Holy Spirit convicts the world here and now through the preaching of law and gospel. When he does, a miracle takes place. Now, it's not as obvious as many miracles in the Bible. I'd love to see God part the Red Sea. I'd love to see Jesus turn water into wine or heal the sick or walk on water. But some of God's greatest miracles are hard to see. God changes hearts. He uses nothing but his word to do it. He calls sin what it is. He threatens eternal punishment. And then he announces that Jesus has taken all that sin away. And he gives faith and heals hearts and comforts us here through that message. The Holy Spirit continues to convict our world because that is the only way to get to the gospel. It's the only way to get anyone to heaven.

It's how we got our faith and how we will get to heaven. Jesus died and rose. God has forgiven us. We will live with him forever. Jesus left us to send the Holy Spirit to proclaim that message. We will continue to see people come to faith, even in a world like ours that is becoming more and more antichristian. The Holy Spirit will work until our Lord comes back. Take comfort in that. Amen.