

**Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta**  
**“The Holy Spirit Your Advocate” (John 15:26)**  
**May 23, 2021**  
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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On this Pentecost Sunday we celebrate God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry John the Baptist had identified Jesus as both the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). And as we heard in today’s passage from the Gospel According to John, on the night before his passion and death, Jesus promised his disciples he would send the Holy Spirit: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (John 15:26).

And after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, as we read in today’s passage from Acts, Jesus did exactly what he had promised his disciples he would do and poured out on them Holy Spirit, as Luke recounts:

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).

There are so many ways the Holy Spirit moves and works in the church. It is the Holy Spirit who opens our hearts to the grace and truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and enables us to proclaim Jesus as Lord. It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the scriptures, the word of God. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires the hearing of the Word of God’s grace and who fills us anew through of the Sacraments of God’s grace. It is the Holy Spirit who enables all of us in the church to serve God and one another with various gifts of the Holy Spirit, all of which serve to build up the Body of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and calls us to repent and turn back to God. It is the Holy Spirit who personally reminds us of the very real presence of God in our lives. Most importantly, it is the Holy Spirit who pours the love of God into our hearts.

Many sermons could be preached on each of these roles of the Holy Spirit in the church and in our individual lives, but today I am preaching on just one specific role of the Holy Spirit: how the Holy Spirit is your Advocate.

The Greek word translated “Advocate” in today’s passage from John is *paraclete*, which in other English translations is often rendered “Counselor” or “Helper” or “Comforter.” A *paraclete* is someone who comes alongside you, who speaks to you on Jesus’ behalf, and who comforts you when life breaks your heart. In biblical times a *paraclete* was your defense attorney, who was on your side and would defend you and speak on your behalf.

The primary work of the Holy Spirit your Advocate, is to assure you that you are a beloved child of God—as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians:

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:4-7).

Along these same lines he later wrote to the Romans, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” and later adds:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:14-16).

The Holy Spirit, your Advocate, reminds you in your heart that you are a beloved child of God, so beloved in fact that Jesus died to prove it.

John the Evangelist also emphasized this, as he wrote in his prologue to his account of the gospel, “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12)—and later in his first letter: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1). This is very good news especially for those who have a strained relationship with their parents—for as the psalmist wrote, “Though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will sustain me” (Psalm 27:14).

I recently reread John Steinbeck's classic 1952 novel *East of Eden*, one of the most insightful novels you will ever read about how parents and children actually relate to one another. Along these lines Steinbeck observes:

The greatest terror a child can have is that he (or she) is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt—and there is the story of mankind (270).

I think Steinbeck is right—"everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection." For those of you who have felt that rejection from your parents, the role of the Holy Spirit your Advocate, in reassuring you that no matter what you have experienced with your parents, you remain a beloved child of God can minister healing and hope on a very deep level. Your Heavenly Father has never rejected you, and never will.

The best book I have ever read on the work of the Holy Spirit to assure you of your identity as a beloved child of God is the late Brennan Manning's powerful 1994 book *Abba's Child*. Listen to what he wrote about how the Holy Spirit your Advocate assures you that you are a beloved child of God:

The indwelling Spirit bears the indelible stamp of the compassion of God, and the heart of the Spirit-filled person overflows with tenderness...As partakers of the divine nature, the noblest aspiration and the most demanding task of our lives is to become like Christ...If God is viewed primarily as omniscient, growth in wisdom and knowledge becomes the foremost priority of human existence. If God is envisioned as all-powerful, seeking authority in order to influence others is the way to become like God. If God is perceived as immutable and invulnerable, granite-like consistency and a high threshold for pain is the way of godliness. The life of Jesus suggests that to be like Abba is to show compassion (and) Scripture points to an intimate connection between compassion and forgiveness. According to Jesus, a distinctive sign of Abba's child is the willingness to forgive our enemies (66-67).

In other words, the Holy Spirit your Advocate not only assures you that you are a beloved child of God, but also that God sees you through the lens of compassion (not a lens of judgment, not a lens of condemnation—a lens of compassion)—which is why scripture tells us “when (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

And Brennan Manning is exactly right—God’s compassion and forgiveness are directly linked as Jesus made crystal clear in his last prayer on your behalf from the cross: “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”

And because you are a beloved child of God, and because God sees you through the lens of compassion, the Holy Spirit your Advocate also assures you that you are forgiven by God—completely, totally, absolutely forgiven by God. And what this means is that you can respond to God’s love and forgiveness by loving and forgiving others—yes, even those who have hurt you the worst or utterly rejected you—and even loving and forgiving yourself.

“When the Advocate comes,” Jesus said, “whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf”...testify what on Jesus’ behalf? That you are eternally loved by God, that you are totally forgiven by God, that you are completely accepted by God who would never reject you because Jesus was already rejected in your place.

So on this Pentecost may the Holy Spirit your Advocate testify anew in your heart that you are a beloved child of God, now and forever.

Amen.