

“Another Helper”

Introduction: Prior to Pentecost, we heard Jesus instruct his followers to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. They could really do nothing that Jesus would have them do, until the Spirit came to empower and guide them. Jesus had given them a picture of this when they had been out fishing all night without him, and caught nothing. As they returned to shore, he instructed them to throw their nets over on the right side of the boat. When they did, they were unable to haul in their nets so many fish had they caught. The point is, they would need him to be with them if they were going to undertake the “fish for people” mission on which he was sending them.

It's quite possible that they would have linked this episode with words he had spoken to them just prior to his arrest and crucifixion (Jn. 14-16). They might have remembered him saying that he would not leave them as orphans but would send another Helper who would be with them forever. The Holy Spirit was his name. So, following the ascension of Jesus, they waited, for the Spirit, and as they waited they prayed (Ac. 1:14).

Then, with Pentecost, the Spirit came, in dramatic fashion, as we saw and heard. And yet, as we see the community of God's people being formed, we see them devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, *and to prayer.* (2:42). So, here's the question: now that these folks are no longer waiting for the Spirit to come, why do they still see a need to pray? Because now it was time, if not to wait for, to wait *on* the Spirit, to wait on the Spirit to move and to empower, to guide and to direct. Waiting on the Spirit, we see, is as much a matter of prayer as waiting for.

I. The Personal Spirit

A. As we think about that, I think it is helpful to remind ourselves that the Spirit is personal. Sometimes we're inclined to think that the Spirit is a kind of power or force, and hence we use the word “it” to describe him. But Jesus never refers to the Spirit in such an impersonal way. “Another Helper” is how he begins to identify the Spirit. The word from which “helper” comes is a very flexible word and so some translations choose to use advocate, comforter, or counselor. All four are found as a part of the Spirit's role to come alongside us and meet us where we are and how we need it. And, each is the activity, not of a force but of a person.

B. Further, consider the word “another.” Know that there are two Greek words that our one English word “another” translates. One word means something additional and/or different. The second word means another just like the first one. It is the second word that Jesus uses here. The Spirit who was to come would be another Helper, just like the first one. And who was that? The first Helper sent by the Father was Jesus, which is why Jesus goes on to say, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” In and through the Spirit, Jesus comes to those who put their trust in him. He is with us, and is in us!

C. And with this declaration we stick our toes into the deep waters of the triune God, with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit revealed as three different persons, with one divine essence.

Illustration: One way to picture this is to think about a pretzel. A good, whole pretzel has three holes. The first hole is not the second hole, nor is the second hole the third hole or the third hole the

first hole. But they're all tied together by the same dough. And so God the Father, Son, and Spirit, while being three different persons, all share the same divine attributes and characteristics.

The important point is that the Spirit, like the Father and Son, is a person we can be in relationship with. He is not a power to use to our own advantage, rather, he is a person we can come to know. Thinking about using power is like buying more memory for your computer, or a bigger motor for your boat. The operative question is: How can we get more of it? But if we think about the Spirit as a person with whom we are building a relationship with, the operative question is: How can he get more of me/us? The first thought expresses a desire to use the Spirit. It will lead to pride and self-glorification. The second expresses a willingness to be used by the Spirit. It will lead to humble service for the glory of God.

II. Waiting on the Spirit

A. So how might we go about this, about coming to know the Spirit so that he can empower us for his glory and guide us for our good, as both individuals and as a church? Prayer seems to be the way those first Christians both waited for, and on, the Spirit – so what might that look?

Gordon Smith, in his volume, *Alone with the Lord*, offers a helpful outline to focus our praying, to help us make space for the Spirit to move. It's a guide intended to help direct a personal retreat, but its outline is still helpful for other times and seasons of prayer as well. Smith notices four primary activities of the Spirit:

1. The Spirit assures us that we are loved: "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." – Ro. 5:5
2. The Spirit convicts us of our sin: "And when he [the Spirit] comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment." – Jn. 16:8
3. The Spirit illumines our mind and heart, helping us learn more about Jesus: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me." – John 15:26
4. The Spirit guides us in times of choice: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." – John 16:12-13

If we take these four activities of the Spirit to prayer, we might begin by reflecting of the love God has for us, identifying that for which we're grateful, and reflecting, as the apostle Paul does in the verses prior, on the peace and the hope that we have in Jesus. We can then move into a time of confession, seeing ourselves in truth, identifying the ways we have lived in darkness instead of light. Then we might spend some time reflecting on a short passage of scripture, seeking to notice where the Spirit, who inspired God's word in the first place, might be getting our attention today. Finally, we can then lay out what lies ahead in the coming day and ask for the Spirit's guidance as we go.

Such a structure can help foster the intentionality that we need to abide with, keep in step with, and be filled, the Spirit, enjoying time spent with the one who desires to be with us, empowering and guiding us along the way. So, as we think about the Spirit, may we think about him as a person, and seek to spend some time getting to know him.