

**Reflection: The Advocate**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Two elderly women were out for a Sunday drive in a large car and both could barely see over the dashboard. As they were cruising along, they came to an intersection. The stoplight was red but they just went on through. The woman in the passenger seat thought to herself, “I must be losing it. I could have sworn we just went through a red light.” After a few more minutes they came to another intersection and the light was red again, and again they went right through. This time the woman in the passenger seat was almost sure that the light had been red but was really concerned that she was losing it. She was getting nervous and decided to pay very close attention to the road and the next intersection to see what was going on. At the next intersection, sure enough, the light was definitely red and they went right through, and she turned to the other woman and said, “Mildred! Did you know we just ran through three red lights in a row? You could have killed us!” Mildred turned to her and said, “Oh, am I driving?”

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”*

The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the one who walks along beside—God will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. It would be nice if this Holy Spirit would be just a little more open about its presence—a little more vocal in its intentions—a little stronger in guiding us down the path the Holy Spirit would have us go. It would be far easier if the Holy Spirit would just show up in a cheesehead or sombrero or graduation cap to let us know the Holy Spirit was present in that moment in our lives. But since we do not often have the luxury of knowing that the Holy Spirit has been at work in our lives, I am comforted by the promises I read in Scripture.

*“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence. If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.”* Psalm 139:7-10

*“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”* Romans 8:26

*“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”* 2 Corinthians 3:17

I found a new dent in my car this week. No one in my family is owning up. Was it the door of another parked car in a parking lot? Did a kid’s bike make the dent? Without confession, my only resolution is to wonder and let the offender go free. It reminded me of a woman named Ada. She stood about 4’5” tall and was well into her eighties when I met her. She drove a huge Cadillac. And when Ada came to church she would often barrel into the parking lot. Well one Sunday during an outdoor cookout after church, I watched Ada leave the parking lot. When she put her car in reverse, she did not turn around to look behind her – in fact, she could not see behind her seat. So it was no surprise a few weeks later when she showed up at church with her passenger sideview mirror hanging off her car by a single wire. “What happened?” I asked. And she told me she misjudged the side of her garage when she was pulling her car in. Not three weeks later the mirror on the driver’s side door disappeared. And I wondered how long her family would let her continue to drive. Well two weeks later, after church one Sunday, a woman came into the sanctuary to tell me that Ada had backed up in the church parking lot and stopped when she heard metal against metal...not so bad – until I found out that the metal of the second car she backed into – was my car. It was not long after that experience that Ada’s daughter began driving her to church. Sometimes the Holy Spirit stays hidden and inspires us in the most secretive ways. Sometimes the Holy Spirit shows up with taillights and a bumper to nudge us in a new direction.

Reflect for just a moment on the endings and beginnings in your own life and then ask yourself where we would be without God. Without God's love, without the gift of God's Son, Jesus. Without the death of Jesus on the cross. More importantly, where would we be without the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And finally, where would we be without the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth? Jesus tells us that he will ask the Father to give us this Spirit of truth that we might live in this world without the earthly presence of Jesus. That this Holy Spirit will be our helper in this world.

I will not leave you orphaned, says Jesus. I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. That is the good news that comes to us this morning. This is the good news of what the living Word can accomplish in this world. Jesus tells us that because he lives, we also will live. It is this living Word that allows us to live in this world and struggle with the pain and suffering that this world can bring at times.

But it is in the midst of that suffering that God comes into our lives and lifts us up. It is the pain and darkness of this life that brings Jesus to our side to offer a word of hope and love and peace in places where only despair, hatred, and violence occur. Because I live, you also will live, says Jesus. It is that promise that brings hope to the hopeless and light to the darkness. When the suffering of the world seems to encompass everything around you—look to the cross and remember the gift given to each of us in the death of a Savior. Remember that Jesus has suffered in this world too. Remember that Jesus has suffered hatred and abuse, betrayal and silence. On the cross Jesus suffered at the hands of those whom he loved. What suffering could compare with death on the cross? Remember that suffering comes in a variety of packages.

We are not called to judge the suffering of others, but to ease it if we are able. To visit the lonely, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, free the captive, proclaim justice for the oppressed, shelter the stranger. We all suffer. We suffer with struggles of age, gender, ability, esteem, discernment, illness, and faith. The suffering, the struggles—they are not tests provided by God. Not tests to see what the limits of our faith might be or how well we respond to God's call under pressure. The suffering, the struggles are not tests—they just are. Suffering exists. The struggles exist. They come and go. And like everyone else we either choose to face them or ignore them. Either way we somehow end up having to deal with them right away or later on down the road. Nevertheless, suffering is not from God. It is not God's will that we suffer. However, it is God's will that God's Holy Spirit walk by our side through the suffering and the struggle. And that my friends – is enough promise for today. Amen.