



The Absent Present Christ

John 14

The disciples were feeling apprehensive. It was starting to dawn upon them that the Jesus whom they had followed, enthused about, loved, depended on for three years of their lives was going away. We know from scripture that it was only dawning slowly that going away meant dying even though Jesus was very explicit about it, and no more clearly than in the Upper Room. In John's account of the Gospel, Jesus made it explicit that He was going away.

So in the very opening verses of John 14 when Jesus said *"Don't let your hearts be troubled"* he knew that anxiety was building up in them. Jesus was going. What was going on? What were they going to do? When you come to depend on someone and then they go how do we react? We just can't imagine how we are going to live without them.

Wife/Husband? Close friend? Pastor?

And this is what was registering with them. The first part of the discourse concerns the fact Jesus was going to prepare a place for them and come back and get them (verse 18). Just as He was going to the Father, they would join Him. These promises our ours too! There's a door in heaven with our name on it! Our place!

But what were they going to do whilst He was gone? Here was the amazing thing that was going to happen. They weren't going to see Him but they were going to get someone else!

16 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever. 17 He is the Spirit who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.

Jesus calls Him the Helper – the Counsellor, the Comforter, the Advocate – the Paraclete. It's a greek word - (*paráklētos*, "one who consoles, one who intercedes on our behalf, a comforter or an advocate" - Strong). He's "another paraclete, suggesting Jesus is the first. If we look at the person and work of the Spirit, we see He has the same intercessory role as Jesus e.g He pleads for us (Romans 8 26 *In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. 27 And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will*). Jesus does the same. Hebrews 7:23 *There is another difference: there were many of those other priests, because they died and could not continue their work. 24 But Jesus lives on for ever, and his work as priest does not pass on to someone else. 25 And so he is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through him, because he lives for ever to plead with God for them.* Why "two" intercessors? He's the other paraclete. Jesus intercedes from the vantage of heaven and the Holy Spirit does it from the vantage of indwelling us. But because they are both Persons of a Triune God, that's hardly surprising as they work in harmony.

However that just goes to illustrate the point. Jesus was going in body, but to them would come One who was the same, but he acts in a different way. They would know Him, but the world wouldn't see Him - The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you. Alexander MacLaren (19th Century Scottish Baptist Minister) described Jesus as the Absent Present Christ. He's not here in body because His Spirit is with us and in us – a far closer relationship.

So how do I know Jesus exists? I can do a worldly analysis and come to no conclusion because the world can't see Him. But He's here and that's all I or you need to know. It's our proof to ourselves.

So it leads me to the first point:

The absent Christ is the present Christ

Jesus isn't an absent saviour, He's a present one because by the Holy Spirit He lives in each one of us. Because the Holy Spirit isn't a different God, He's the One God, but He's also the other Paraclete. He's God in us, not God with us. Different. Unlike the pre-Pentecost disciples, we experience Jesus, and for that matter the Father and Spirit in a more fundamental way. God isn't with us, He's part of us! Or perhaps I could put it better when I say, we are part of Him because He has made us a part of His family, His church, His BODY. That's what happened at Pentecost; the church was born. God's people became the body of Christ. God isn't with us He is in us. Alexander MacLaren put it this way: *It is true about Him that He "departs from" His people in bodily form "for a season, that they may receive Him" in a better form "for ever."*

I just used the word Paraclete. John uses this greek word eight times in connection with the Holy Spirit here in John's Gospel – Greg Herrick - *the Paraclete performs several essential functions here in John's Gospel: 1) teaching and reminding (14:26); 2) testifying about Christ (15:26); 3) guiding into all truth; revealing the future and making the things of Christ known to the disciples as well as glorifying Christ (16:13, 14).* This morning I gave you the words from 1 Corinthians 2:12. These say the same thing as Jesus gives us in John 14-16 as far as I can see.

And what is the Spirit to us. Jesus uses the words "I will send you *another* Paraclete. Jesus was the first Paraclete. The Holy Spirit is another Paraclete – the same as Jesus was – the helper, the consoler, the comforter, the advocate, the one who utters the words when we can't utter them. Jesus is absent – but He's present so we need never fear in any situation – because He's here. The difference between them is that the Spirit is here in a different way, a much closer way than Jesus was.

So when Jesus was with the disciples, He taught them, He helped them, He loved them, He showed them His power, He told them off, He inspired them, He showed them the power of God. The Spirit is another Paraclete – He does the same. Let's go back to John:

26 The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

16:3 When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come. 14 He will give me glory, because he will take what I say and tell it to you. 15 All that my Father has is mine; that is why I said that the Spirit will take what I give him and tell it to you.

How do we understand the things of God? Because the Holy Spirit reveals them to us. Just as Jesus helped the disciples understand profound truth, the Holy Spirit does the same for us. God speaks, we understand by the Holy Spirit. God had given us His written word to make us wise, but best of all He gives us His Spirit so we can hear what Jesus is saying and those words are the Father's words also.

So the absent Christ, by the Spirit is the present Christ; just as if Jesus was here – well He is, by His Spirit. He's the absent present Christ.

The unseen Christ is the seen Christ

The second thought I would like to bring you this evening again has been inspired by Alexander MacLaren from this passage. You see, If Jesus isn't here, people can't see Him. We know He exists because we have His Spirit. So how are they going to see proof that Jesus exists? Well, the unseen Christ in us – the Holy Spirit – should mean that our lives makes Christ visible. This is what Jesus said in John 13:

31 After Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him. 32 And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. 33 My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.' 34 And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved

you, so you must love one another. 35 If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

The bottom line is that as it says in Acts 1:8 *But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* That’s the message of Scripture. That command is to us too. We will be His witnesses because we’re filled with power. Power? Us? Yes, but we need to turn the gas on. We need to allow Him to use us.

That’s the challenge of Pentecost – to ask God to release His power in our lives, in His church. Why? So that we can make the unseen Christ seen by men and women who are part of our lives and who are part of the community in which this church is set. That’s the challenge of Pentecost. We know from John 16:7 *But I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God’s judgement. 9 They are wrong about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 they are wrong about what is right, because I am going to the Father and you will not see me any more; 11 and they are wrong about judgement, because the ruler of this world has already been judged.*

But how does he prove that. Yes he has persuasive powers to change people that we don’t – but God’s chosen way is to use us. We are the proof – if we’ll let Him make us that proof. Over the next few weeks we shall be exploring how God releases us from things that tie us down so that we can be the people of God that He’s made us to be. God wants us to be the seen Christ by His Spirit. Let’s let Him fill us and use us: to allow His Spirit to flow through us to change lives.

Prayer.

*Preached by Mark Reid
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