

Contents

Trinity Sunday

*When the Spirit of truth
comes, he will guide you
into all the truth. . .*

Contributor:
D. Andrew Kille
editor@bibleworkbench.org

	Page
1. Lectionary Selection	20
John 16:12-15	
2. Exploring the Pattern	21
3. Reading Between the Lines	24
4. Parallel Readings	25
From:	
<i>Fire in the Earth</i>	
<i>A Live Album (Holly Near)</i>	
<i>The Religious Case</i>	
<i>Against Belief</i>	
5. Critical Background	28
Robert Kysar	

• Lectionary Readings (Year C)

Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading	Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Second Reading	Romans 5:1-5
Gospel	John 16:12-15
Psalm	8

***J*ohn 16:12-15**

1 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the
2 Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his
3 own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are
4 to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
5 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine
6 and declare it to you."

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

1. Today's lectionary reading drops us into the middle of an extended monologue in which John presents Jesus as bidding farewell to his disciples and preparing them for his impending departure. The scene begins in chapter 13 with Jesus washing the disciples' feet at dinner, and the confrontation with Judas Iscariot, who is about to betray him. Following Judas' departure, Jesus begins to speak:

Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. [13:31]

From this point until the beginning of chapter 17, Jesus is essentially the only speaker, though occasionally one or more of the disciples will raise a question:

Simon Peter asks:

"Lord, where are you going?" and "Lord, why can I not follow you now?" [13:36-37]

Thomas says:

"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" [14:5]

Philip declares:

"Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." [14:8]

Judas (not Iscariot) asks:

"Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" [14:22]

An unidentified cluster of disciples ask one another:

"What does he mean by saying to us, 'A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" . . . "What does he mean by this 'a little while'?"

And they declare:

"We do not know what he is talking about." [15:17-18]

At the Workbench: Trinity Sunday

Finally, at the end, John suggests that they finally get it:
His disciples said, "Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God." [16:29-30]

Judging from the questions they are asking, what might be foremost on the disciples' minds?

If every question contains a statement, what might the disciples be saying to Jesus?

How would you describe the relationship between Jesus and his disciples throughout these chapters?

2. Today's text represents only a moment in the discussion. Choose three people in your group to read the text. Close your eyes and picture the scene in that room. Who is there in the room with you? What do you see? Hear? Smell?

Consider what has happened already this evening: Jesus' washing your feet; Judas suddenly rushing out after taking a piece of bread and being named as a betrayer. Jesus saying he will be with you only a little while longer.

After a few moments, have each of the readers read in turn, pausing between each reading:

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

How do these words strike you? What do you understand Jesus to be saying?

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

John 16:12-15 • May 30, 2010

What fears rise up in you on hearing these words? What solace or comfort do you find?

How do you imagine you will recognize *the Spirit of truth*?

What is Jesus asking you to do?

What do you want to ask him?

3. When, if ever, has someone in your world had to leave behind a group of friends, colleagues, partners, or family members, knowing that they might never see them again? In taking leave of that place, what words of advice or consolation did they offer to those who would be left behind? What assurances or hopes did they share for the future? Of what concerns or fears did they give warning? What remained unspoken, or perhaps even unacknowledged, in their departure?

4. What do you know of a guiding *Spirit of truth* within you? What, if anything, gives you a sense of heading in the right direction, of making the right choices, of "sailing due North"?

When have you been certain that you hear its voice?

From where does it derive its authority?

When have you felt unable to hear the *Spirit of truth*?

What habits or practices might you develop in your daily living to enable you to touch that *Spirit*?

Reading Between the Lines

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." What do you recall from your own experience of a time when you or someone else held back from speaking something to another person out of concern for how hard it might be for them to hear it? What might there be in your daily life and relationships that you *cannot bear* just yet to hear, to see, to know? What makes them unbearable? What is needed before you feel ready to deal with them? What strength, support, perspective, attitude, or calmness of spirit do you long for in order to face them? Where do you find those resources—where do they come from? How do you discover them, nurture them, encourage them?



editor@bibleworkbench.org

"... All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." David Whyte the poet writes of such a moment in "Revelation" in Parallel Readings. Revelation it seems can be heard or seen. Either way it seems to involve discovering something to be true that one was unaware of before. When you hear or see "it" for the first time there is a sense in which "you are on your own for the first time." What do you know of such a moment of revelation in your life? How has it been "declared" to you in a time of crisis, intimacy, despair, ecstasy, or wonder? Where do you think the "revelation" came from? Why did you hear or see it in that moment and not before? How long did you gestate with the revelation awaiting its birth? How did it change you? What has it cost you? In what sense did it announce that "you were on your own for the first time"? What are some ways you welcome "revelation" these days? What is the strategy by which you avoid and escape it?



bdols@bibleworkbench.org

Parallel Readings

From *Fire in the Earth*

Revelation Must Be Terrible

Revelation must be
terrible with no time left
to say goodbye.

Imagine that moment
staring at the still waters
with only the brief tremor

of your body to say
you are leaving everything
and everyone you know behind.

Being far from home is hard, but you know,
at least we are all exiled together.
When you open your eyes to the world

you are on your own for
the first time. No one is
even interested in saving you now

and the world steps in
to test the calm fluidity of your body
from moment to moment

as if it believed you could join
its vibrant dance
of fire and calmness and final stillness.

As if you were meant to be exactly
where you are, as if
like the dark branch of a desert river

you could flow on without a speck
of guilt and everything
everywhere would still be just as it should be.

As if your place in the world mattered
and the world could
neither speak nor hear the fullness of

David Whyte, "Revelation Must Be Terrible" in *Fire in the Earth*, (Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 2002), pp. 32-33. Reprinted with permission.

its own bitter and beautiful cry
without the deep well
of your body resonating in the echo.

Knowing that it takes only
that one, terrible
word to make the circle complete,

revelation must be terrible
knowing you can
never hide your voice again.

David Whyte

From *A Live Album*

It Could Have Been Me

It could have been me, but instead it was you.
So I'll keep doing the work you were doing as if I were two.
I'll be a student of life, a singer of songs,
A farmer of food and a righter of wrong.
It could have been me, but instead it was you,
And it may be me dear sisters and brothers
Before we are through.
But if you can work for freedom
freedom, freedom, freedom,
If you can work for freedom I can too.

Holly Near

From *The Religious Case Against Belief*

A third way that the drama in the cathedral at Worms illustrates the phenomenon of belief lies in the fact that it was an affair of highly learned men. Young Luther had already shown commanding scholarly talent; the emperor himself was both devout and a passable student of doctrine; present in the assembled company was a stable of Christendom's most powerful intellectual forces; there was no shortage of knowledge or subtlety of thought; everyone of them was thoroughly multilingual. These remarkable facts should make us wonder why they so passionately resisted each other's arguments, finding not the merest patch of common ground. It obviously cannot be that there is a division in knowledge itself. Because their educations were identical, it can only be a division between knowers. What else can we say but that they chose not to think what their opponents were thinking? Here then is a trenchant clue to understanding our subject: *belief marks the line at which our thinking stops*, or, perhaps better, the place

Holly Near, "It Could Have Been Me." Originally released on *A Live Album* 1974, then *Journeys* 1983, then *And Still We Sing* 2002. Copyright © 1974 by Hereford Music. All rights reserved.

James P. Carse, *The Religious Case Against Belief*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 44-45.

where we confine our thinking to a carefully delineated region. Maoists or creationists or jihadists or libertarians take a severely critical view of the world, but they do not step across their created boundaries to take an equally severe view of themselves.

Believers stop their thinking at a designated line when they refuse to see their shared dependence with disbelievers. They do this even though at some level they are aware that they are doing it—a classic act of willful ignorance. Only by being willfully ignorant do we not acknowledge that, as believers, we have drawn real dialogue with others to a halt. Each of our beliefs is shielded against the damaging scrutiny of others—and ourselves. We have passed from a conversational to a declarative mode. We have nothing more to say to one another about our beliefs except to announce and defend them. The young Luther, a manifestly brilliant thinker, let his thinking go only so far. But so did his examiners. Both sides knew perfectly well that they had drawn the boundary line in tandem, but the line could hold only if they did not step across it to look back at themselves from another perspective. As in a student debating contest, they could have switched sides and ably argued each other's position—but by doing so they would have necessarily opened their thinking to new possibilities. In other words, *they invented a division within a shared knowledge that need not exist*. They were certainly intelligent enough to think the thoughts of the other, but it was precisely this that they refused to do.

James P. Carse

Believers stop their thinking at a designated line when they refuse to see their shared dependence with disbelievers.

Critical Background

From *The Maverick Gospel*

Reader's Preparation: Read the following passages in which Jesus speaks of an Advocate: 14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15. Consider these questions: Who is this Advocate? How is the Advocate related to Christ and to the Father? What does the Advocate do and to whom or for whom? What are the major affirmations about the Advocate made in these passages?

The next thing we must do in our investigation of the pneumatology (that is, what is believed and taught about the Spirit) of the Fourth Gospel is to examine the peculiar word that it sometimes uses for the Spirit. That word is Paraclete (*paraklêtos*). The Fourth Gospel is the only New Testament document that uses this word to describe the Spirit. Its meaning is a bit difficult to define exactly. In effect, there are at least four different shades of meaning and hence four translations of the Greek word. The first two have in common the fact that they both come from the language of the legal court system of the day. Paraclete may mean "one called to the side of another to help." This is one who is called to assist a client in a court case. Hence, the translation "Advocate" is used for the Greek word in the New Revised Standard Version. The second meaning is similar. The Paraclete is "one who intercedes, entreats, or makes appeals for another." Again the context is a legal trial. The Paraclete is the defense attorney (a sort of Perry Mason figure, if you will), who speaks on behalf of the defendant. Therefore, the translation "Intercessor" is sometimes found in the passages you read.

The next two possible meanings of the Greek word *paraklêtos* are not legal or court meanings. The first is "one who comforts and consoles another." This meaning of the Greek gave rise to the translation "Comforter." As if this array were not enough, we find that this fascinating Greek word was also used to designate one who "proclaims or exhorts." So the word could also be appropriately translated "Proclaimer."

Obviously the word was a very rich one in our Evangelist's day. It was one with multiple and varied meanings—Advocate, Intercessor, Consoler, and Proclaimer. The Fourth Evangelist seems to combine the meanings in a new way to create a new concept. We know, too, that the word was used in some Jewish circles regarding the functions of the angels. The Gospel of John has taken this rich word and applied it to the Spirit of God. The result is an amazing theology of the Spirit. This should not surprise us. We saw in chapter 1 how the Gospel

Robert John Kysar, *The Maverick Gospel*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), pp. 108-111. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox.

does essentially the same thing with the word “Logos,” which also had wide and varied meanings. By applying it to Christ this Gospel suggests a profound and penetrating view of Christ. Much the same is true of the Spirit. With the word “Paraclete” the Fourth Gospel catches the imagination of a wide range of readers and opens numerous avenues of meaning for the Spirit. It is safe to say that the Fourth Evangelist had a way with words. Much of the genius of this Gospel is rooted in their provocative use. On that score its author has as much in common with a good poet as with a good theologian.

Surely the application of the word “Paraclete” to designate the Spirit means something more. It means that for some reason the Johannine community was not entirely satisfied with the simple title of Spirit. Of course, the Gospel uses that expression without any apparent reservation, as we have seen. But when it comes to the explication of the role of the Holy Spirit in chapters 14 through 16 the Gospel begins to employ the word “Paraclete.” Maybe the Evangelist objected to a common idea among the Jews that there was a special angel who functioned as the Paraclete. Perhaps the passage dares to give the Christian concept of the Spirit of God a special designation in order to affirm that Christ alone gives the Spirit, and the Spirit alone is the Paraclete. Dealing with the leaders of the Jewish synagogue, the Johannine Christians needed to speak of the presence of God in their midst in a distinctive way. For whatever reason, the Gospel of John attaches this title to the Spirit and thereby provokes a great deal of thought.

We must try to summarize the nature and function of the Paraclete as the Gospel of John describes it. (Here as elsewhere in this discussion of the Paraclete, I am profoundly indebted to Raymond E. Brown’s excellent appendix on the subject in his commentary on John, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible, vol. 29a.) About the nature of the Paraclete we can say two things:

1. The Paraclete comes from and is related to both the Father and the Son:

- a. The Paraclete comes only if Jesus departs (15:26; 16:7, 8, 13).
- b. The Paraclete comes from the Father (15:26).
- c. The Father gives the Paraclete in response to Jesus’ request (14:16).
- d. The Paraclete is sent in Jesus’ name (14:26).
- e. Jesus sends the Paraclete from the Father (15:26; 16:7).

2. The Paraclete is identified in a number of different ways:

- a. “Another Paraclete,” implying that Jesus is the first (14:16).
- b. The “Spirit of Truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13).
- c. The “Holy Spirit” (14:26).

With the word “Paraclete” the Fourth Gospel catches the imagination of a wide range of readers and opens numerous avenues of meaning for the Spirit.

At the Workbench: Trinity Sunday

In summary of this evidence, we may say that the Paraclete is a continuation of Christ, even the alter ego of Christ. What is said of the relationship of the Son to the Father throughout the Gospel can be said in large part of the relationship of the Paraclete to the Father. But this mysterious being is dependent on Christ's ministry. The Paraclete is, as it were, "act two" that cannot begin until "act one" (Jesus' ministry) is completed.

We may speak about the function of the Paraclete under two separate categories:

Obviously, according to the Fourth Gospel, the Paraclete has a twofold function: to communicate Christ to believers and, to put the world on trial and find it guilty as charged.

1. The relationship of the Paraclete to the disciples. The Paraclete

- a. Is easily recognized by the disciples (14:17).
- b. Is within and continues to remain with them (14:16-17).
- c. Is their teacher (16:13).
- d. Announces to them things that are to occur in the future (16:13).
- e. Declares what belongs to Christ and what does not (16:14).
- f. Glorifies Christ (16:14).
- g. Witnesses to Christ (15:26).
- h. Reminds the disciples of all that Jesus said (14:26).
- i. Speaks only what is heard (16:13).

2. The relationship of the Paraclete to the world. The world

- a. Cannot accept the Paraclete (14:17).
- b. Cannot see or recognize the Paraclete (14:7).
- c. Rejects the Paraclete (15:26).
- d. But its rejection does not prevent the Paraclete's witness to Christ (15:26).
- e. Is condemned, proven wrong, and pronounced guilty of sin by the Paraclete (16:8-11). (John 16:8-11 is a very difficult passage both to translate and to understand. But the summary catches at least some of its basic meaning.)

Obviously, according to the Fourth Gospel, the Paraclete has a twofold function: to communicate Christ to believers and, to put the world on trial and find it guilty as charged.

The Fourth Evangelist is solving two basic problems with this view of the Paraclete. The first is a problem faced by a great deal of New Testament literature, namely, the delay of the Parousia. Christ has not returned as he was expected to do. But, asserts the Evangelist, he has reappeared in the form of the Paraclete. He is present even though it seems that the Parousia never occurred. The Paraclete and Christ are closely identified in the passages we have examined just so this point could be made. The Paraclete is Christ in our midst, claims the Evangelist! The Evangelist is showing readers that the old Christian expectation of the return of Christ was looking in

the wrong direction. Don't look into the future for the return of Christ. Look, rather, into the present experience of the community. The Christians' experience of the Spirit is their experience of the reappeared Christ. The Parousia has occurred but not in the rather gross way it was expected. Hence, the view of the Paraclete in the Gospel is part of the eschatology of the book. It is a segment of the present eschatology taught by the Evangelist, and a part of the writer's conviction that the present experience of the believer is pregnant with possibility.

The Gospel of John was also answering a much greater question with its doctrine of the Paraclete. The delay of the Parousia was a peculiarly Christian problem at one stage in the history of that religion. The other problem with which the Fourth Evangelist wrestles is a much more universal concern. It is the problem of historical distance from the time of revelation. If a religion teaches that the Ultimate Reality has been revealed at a particular point in history, a question immediately arises. How can persons avail themselves of that revelation if they live at a later point in history? Christianity was later to solve this problem by the creation of a canon. It said that the historical revelation of God is preserved in these certain writings—the Bible—and one may have access to that revelation through the reading of the Bible. But the Johannine Christians lived in a day before there was a Christian canon. The Gospel's answer to the question of bridging the temporal gap back to the historical revelation is through the person and work of the Paraclete.

The Christians' experience of the Spirit is their experience of the reappeared Christ.

Robert John Kysar

