

Power partners

Part 1, John 14:15-27

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

A father was trying to explain to his six-year-old daughter why he had to work overseas for six months. The explanations weren't going so well. All his finest reasons were being drowned out by torrents of dramatic wailing and the pounding of little fists and feet on the floor. In the end the father took a picture of himself and placed it on the end of his little girl's bed and gathering her into his arms he told her that whenever she missed him she could look at the picture and know that he was thinking of her. The little girl looked fairly dubious about this but she was too exhausted to continue the battle. Six months later the father returned one evening and eagerly went up to his daughter's bedroom only to find a picture on her bed on which were scrawled the words: "see how you like it".

It is really hard to believe that there is a viable substitute for the flesh and blood presence of someone we love. No letters, pictures or even wobbly Skype images can substitute for the huggable, grab-able reality of someone's physical presence. However, in the reading we heard from John 14, Jesus is trying to convince his disciples that there IS something that is just as good, if not better, than Jesus own physical presence and the disciples are struggling to buy it.

A puzzled Judas, the son of James, asks; *But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?*" (John 14:22). Which is to say: Jesus we really can't do this mission without you and Jesus answer was, sure you can because when the Spirit comes it is just like having me with you. This is a really big promise, that being a follower of Jesus, being a Christian, means that we have God's Spirit and that's just like having the flesh and blood Jesus with us. It means that the Jesus who

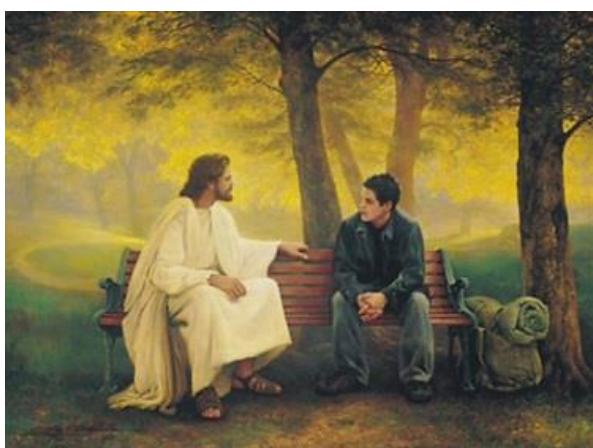
understood what God was doing in the world is with us, helping us understand that kind of stuff (John 13:3). It means that the Jesus who spoke to the people with great authority and totally amazed them is with us, helping us to get our words together (Luke 4:32). It means that the Jesus who miraculously calmed the storm (Mark 4:39), healed and delivered people (Matthew 9:35) will do that with us as well. It means that the Jesus who could face with courage his own torture and death is with us standing with us in all the triumph and tragedy of our lives. It means that the Jesus who returned from the dead with the power of forgiveness (Acts 10:43-44) is with us as if he was there in the flesh.

Jesus' teaching in John 14 is picturing the promised Holy Spirit as something extraordinarily strong and robust and I really wished I had heard about this when I was a young Christian.



My earliest picture of the Holy Spirit was someone who gave dictation so that the Bible could be written.

Later I developed a picture of the Holy Spirit as the good feelings fairy. You know when you are feeling a little blue the Holy Spirit perks you up like a good cup of coffee.



But I don't think I ever remember anyone saying that the Holy Spirit is just like having Jesus with you.

If we move forward in the story of the disciples we see this extraordinary promise lived out. When the Spirit comes, in Acts chapter 2 the disciples go confidently out into the dangerous streets of Jerusalem just as if Jesus was with them. Peter preaches a corker of a sermon as if Jesus was sitting beside him giving him the

words. The disciples choose to radically live together, having everything in common just as if Jesus was right there, teaching them what to do. Peter and John heal a blind beggar just as if Jesus was right there (Acts 3). When Peter and John are arrested, Peter gives a courageous, no holds barred defence of his faith that you would swear came straight out of the mouth of Jesus.

Paul lived this way and he encourages the Christians in Colossae to live this way saying:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

So what we see is this incredible promise of Jesus; that the Holy Spirit will be just as if the flesh and blood Jesus was living with them. So isn't this a promise for you and me as well? Let's have a deeper look at this promise in John 14.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever. (John 14:16)

The word translated counsellor, is the Greek word *Paracletos* (παράκλητος) and it's not the usual New Testament word for the Holy Spirit, which is *Pneuma* (πνεῦμα), which means wind, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for wind *Ruach* (רוּחַ). *Paracletos* in the era of biblical Greek was always used in a legal setting and is probably best translated as defender, as in public defender or lawyer.

The picture Jesus is communicating is that he is sending the disciples into a very testing environment but he will be there beside them as their defender. When they face troubles he will be at their side to explain what is going on. When they go through trials he will defend them and work to set them free. Throughout this passage Jesus continues to make the point that when he goes, he will send them a defender, and it will be just like he was there with them.



*The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives **with** you and will be **in** you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but **you will see me**. Because I live, you also will live. (John 14:17-19)*

It does seem that Jesus is pushing the argument a little here, it may well be that the Spirit can provide the power and presence of Jesus but how can the disciples see Jesus when he is gone? Well, throughout John's gospel Jesus uses the words seeing and knowing to mean, understanding and relationship. The world cannot accept the existence of the spirit because they don't understand who he is or have a relationship with him. The disciples on the other hand have a relationship with the living Jesus, they live with him right at the moment and this same Jesus will live in them, as the Spirit of truth, and in this way they will be able to see Jesus in each other, just as if he was with them. I kind of get what he means, there have been moments in the healing centre when one of the team has been praying for someone, and this amazing prayer has come out of the lips of someone I know so well, but it's not their words, it has this power and a spiritual immediacy that makes me stop in awe because Jesus is here I can see him, there in that face, in those words and in that loving presence that fills the room.

While Jesus is explaining to the disciples what life with the Spirit is going to be like he is also explaining to them why they should trust him on this matter – it's all about family.

In 1938, just as the Second World War was heating up the first of the comic book superheroes hit the news-stands in America and became an instant hit that has lasted to this very day. I have a theory that part of Superman's appeal was that in a time of wavering spiritual belief, superman provided boys and girls with the promise of a righteous defender. In order to give Superman his powers his Jewish creators; Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, gave him an alien heritage on the planet krypton. But in order to explain Superman's warmth, love and care for humanity they had him adopted by a very warm and loving human couple by the name of Jonathan and Martha Kent. In our passage Jesus is using the same explanation. That the reason the disciples can trust they will not be abandoned is because Jesus is a family man. Have a look at these verses that weave throughout Jesus talk.



- **I'm** going to ask the **Father** to send you the **counsellor** (John 14:16)
- **I** will not leave you an orphan, **I** will come to you (John 14:18)
- On that day – you will realise **I** am in my **father** and **you** are in **me** (John 14:20)
- **We** will come to **him** and make **our** home with **him** (John 14:23)
- These words are not **my** own but come from the **father** (John 14:24)

This is a peaking behind the veil moment into one of the great questions of all time: Why should I trust my life to the hands of God? What does he want to do with me? What is his motivation? Jesus reveals that the essential nature of God is family. Father son and Holy Spirit. Who from the very beginning, together created and brought life to the planet and said in Genesis 1:26; let us, plural us, make human beings in our image. And so we were created with the attributes of both God's creativity and God's nature to live in community. Jesus cannot abandon the disciples because that would be entirely against his family nature, which the disciples are now part of. They cannot be orphans because God's whole family will be there with them, Jesus says to the disciple's; **we will come to him and make our home with him.** (John 14:23)

But there does appear to be a condition:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever. (John 14:15, 16)

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23)

What is this obeying his teaching thing? Is there actually an entrance test to get into the family of God? I thought God's love and grace was unconditional, that I cannot work my way into his family, that I cannot prove myself by obediently doing some stuff? Isn't it:

by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So what is this teaching we have to obey, in order to have the Spirit of God? Well in Johns gospel the teaching of Jesus can be summed up in one single verse that appears early on in this very chapter

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

To obey Jesus teaching is to trust that Jesus is who he says he is. The condition for having the Holy Spirit, as if Jesus was standing right there beside us, is to love and to trust Jesus. That's it, it's not an exam or a test, or work that we have to do, because he has done it all. It is simply about a relationship in which we trust, that as we go out into the world the Spirit is with us as if Jesus himself was with us.

Let me tell you about David Ridley, he lives in Darwin Australia with his wife Ruth and their two children Ezekiel and Grace. David worked as the director of Youth for Christ in the Northern Territories and this story is about his first day as chaplain in a youth detention centre.



I still remember the feeling of sleep deprivation as I drove to the Youth Detention Centre for the first time. My wife had given birth to our second child a week before and life was in a bit of a spin. I remember the feelings of inadequacy as I tried to scramble together ideas to share with these youth in lock up. Life had been so intense the last few weeks the full extent of my quiet times with Jesus consisted of reading a few quick verses on the toilet. I wasn't feeling one bit spiritual. I felt like I had nothing to offer.

Amidst my weakness, I heard a thought gently pass through my mind 'It's not about you. How you feel doesn't change the gospel'. I never cease to be amazed how truth dismantles a barrage of lies and deceitful emotions. With that simple thought my perspective began to change. Does the reality and power of Jesus resurrection change just because I'm tired and don't feel spiritual? The fact that I haven't had my 'quiet time' with Jesus doesn't change the truth that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in me.



As I pulled into the Youth Detention Centre I was now armed with an increasing strength as I regained a perspective that the gospel works, despite my weakness. I chose to believe that Jesus is alive and itching to set these young captives free – irrespective of how I felt.

After signing in, I was escorted through steel doors into a concrete jungle where I was taken to the first room with six detainees. This was my first time in the Detention Centre so I wasn't sure what to expect. I sat down at a table and introduced myself. I shared how as a chaplain I don't want to just give information about God, but I want each of them to experience God for themselves.

Believing that God desired to encounter these youth, I began by asking if anyone had pain or injuries that I could pray for. To my surprise none of them needed any prayer. I looked up to the tough looking tattooed prison guard standing next to me. I asked him if he needed any physical healing. He chuckled condescendingly and told me he lives in constant pain. He explained how when he was younger he was accidentally shot in the face and shattered his eye socket. Even after surgery he lived in constant pain. I asked if I could release healing on his eye and believe Jesus to do a miracle. At this stage the youth were egging him on. They wanted to satisfy their curiosity and see if God would show up. The guard obliged and I lay my hand next to his eye and prayed a simple five-second prayer. 'In Jesus name I command pain to leave this eye socket, that it would be fully healed.' I immediately asked the guard how it felt. He prodded his eye with a slightly dazed look on his face. He said softly 'all the pain has gone.'

The youth weren't sure how to respond to witnessing a miracle. They asked the guard again and again, 'Is the pain really gone?' The guard assured them that the pain had completely gone. The atmosphere became thick with amazement as it sunk in what had just happened.

Now that there had been a demonstration of the gospel, I was able to provide a thorough explanation of the gospel. Every eye was fixed on me as I shared how Jesus not only has the power to heal our bodies, but also forgive our sins and make us brand new creations, restoring us back to relationship with himself.

As the guard escorted me to the other rooms, he became my walking testimony as he explained to the detainees what Jesus had done to his eye. In every room we visited every sick person or person with pain in their body who asked for prayer was healed immediately. The gospel was preached "not in persuasive words of wisdom but with demonstrations of the Spirit and of power." (1 Corinthians 2:4)

Do you understand that if you love and trust Jesus you have the Spirit of God within you and that is just the same as having Jesus himself with you? Will you meditate on that truth, will you please remember it when you deal with the world because no one deals with the world better than Jesus did. He is in you, he will not leave you an orphan because he is your defender.