

Sometimes you have to let go of one good thing so that the next good thing can happen. For students and teachers, this is certainly the case this time of year. Some have already ended school and are on break. College students have come home for the summer. The rest of schools will be done in a few days. It's a bittersweet change for many. Students have to leave behind their friends, the teachers that they love, and they can't be in their favorite classes, or enjoy recess and field trips. Teachers have to say goodbye to the students they have learned to love. For some students, eighth-graders, seniors in high school and college, saying goodbye to your friends might not be temporary, but permanent, you might wonder when you will see each other again. You have left a comfortable environment, never to return. Yet only focusing on losing what you love isn't the best way to view the situation. Students! You have summer break to look forward too! You get to sleep in! You get to go on family vacations! You get to take part in summer activities with different friends! Teachers! You have a well-earned break, time to rest and to prepare for the next school year. Parents, lucky you! You get to be with your children 24/7. When Jesus was telling his disciples about his upcoming ascension into heaven, he realized that they were sad to see him go. He acknowledged their feelings, but then pointed them to the good thing that was coming after he left. Sometimes one good thing must end, so the next good thing can come. After Jesus leaves, the Spirit, our Helper comes! He comes to help by convicting and by guiding us to truth.

But why is it a good thing when Jesus says the Spirit, the Helper, comes to convict the world? It is a good thing because the world denies God and his Word. The world can't stand God's Word, and will do everything it can to, degrade it, disregard it, demean it, and disprove it. The world wants to tell you there is no truth, so the Bible can't be true. The world says there is no sin, there is no such thing as righteousness, and that there is no judgement for people when they die. Without the Spirit to guide us, how could we stand up in the face of such opposition? When the Spirit comes to convict, he comes to help us.

When the Spirit comes, he uses God's Word, the law, to convict the world of sin. When people see God's law and see his demand that they do not sin, they will see their guilt. When people see God's law and his demand that they be righteous, they will see that they have failed, miserably. When people see God's law, and that he will bring people to judgement for their sins, people will fear God. This is another section of scripture that talks about the Great Exchange! Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word leads convicted sinners to repentance and to open their hearts to trust in his mercy. The Spirit comes to be a helper.

Yet it isn't just the rest of the world that looks at the law and sees guilt. When we see that God demands that we live a life without sin, that we live a life full of righteousness, meaning that we always seek to love God and one another 24/7 with all of our words and all of our actions, we too see our guilt. We too fear God's judgement for our sin. The Spirit comes to see if there is sin. We have sin.

Yet this fear of judgement is what the Spirit uses to lead us to repentance and to trust in God's mercy. He does the same for us as he does to help the world. The Spirit, through the Word, leads us to faith in Jesus. In Jesus we have all the benefits of his life, death, and resurrection. We have all our sins taken away and have his righteousness. When we stand in faith the Spirit no longer convicts us of sin. There is judgement only, today's text says, for those who do not believe in Jesus. By God's grace, his love that we don't deserve, he has gathered us to himself through his Spirit. His Spirit is really our helper! But the Spirit doesn't stop helping us once he brings us to faith, he continues to help us by guiding us into all truth!

In today's text, Jesus has just finished telling his disciples some difficult news. They are upset to see the world's hate for Jesus and his followers. They are upset to hear that Jesus is going to die and that they themselves will be persecuted and killed. It's all very troubling and sad news to them. Jesus is talking to his disciples before he dies and rises from the dead. There is still much the disciples don't understand, and don't even know.

Jesus lets his disciples know that he understands what they are thinking and feeling. They are full of grief! Jesus knows that they aren't able to comprehend all the wonderful and amazing things he has to tell them, but he still wants to give them hope. He tells them that after he is gone the Spirit will come to guide them into all truth, and to tell them even more things than he can tell them now. He is telling them to be ready to hear and understand all God has to tell them.

Like the disciples, we also can be upset by some of the things God has for us. We are all at different places in our faith and relationship with God. You may have a young or new faith, and you feel like you have much yet to learn about God and his Word. Perhaps you feel as if you have been strengthened in your faith for a long time, but some of the trials and tests God gives you seem to be overwhelming. Or maybe recently you have become stale and stagnant, and wonder if you are just going through the motions of your faith. God knows where you are in your relationship with him. He uses his Spirit to guide you in the right direction and gives you what you need to grow and be strengthened. It can be our prayer to be ready to bear, hear, and understand all God has for us.

The disciples may have thought they lost more with Jesus' ascension than they could gain with the Spirit's coming at Pentecost. The reality was, they gained more of Jesus than they even had before! The Spirit takes what he received from Jesus, including the things too hard to bear at that time, and gives it to us.

Our text today tells us some of the mysteries of God, and the amazing unity of the Trinity. The Spirit doesn't act independently from the Father and the Son, but speaks exactly what he hears from the Son and glorifies him. At the same time what comes from the Son comes from the Father because all that belongs to the Son belongs to the Father as well. When the Helper comes to us, it is the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit speaking to us all at once. It's like a relay race where all the runners on the same team cross the finish at the same time. That's mind-blowing, that's amazing, that's our God!

What the Spirit gives us is absolutely valuable and precious. He gives us the truth. The world wants to hide from God by saying there is no absolute truth. It's all relative, they'll say "what's true for you, isn't true for me." Yet the Spirit's truth is absolute. You can't find a way to say it isn't true, or that it doesn't matter. Sometimes people fear to hear the truth, because they think it might be bad news. But the truth from the Spirit is always good news for us. The truth is God loves us, that he gave his Son to take away our sins. The truth is the Spirit helps us by guiding and strengthening us through his word. The truth is, we never have to fear God's truth when we are in Jesus. Amen.

Theme: The Spirit is our Helper

1. Why is the end of school sometimes difficult? What good things come after?
 2. What were Jesus's disciples sad about?
 3. What does the world try to do to God's Word?
 4. What does the Spirit use to convict the world?
 5. How does the Spirit help us by convicting us of sin?
 6. Why aren't the disciples ready to hear everything Jesus has for them?
 7. What can our prayer be?
 8. Who is speaking to us in God's Word?
 9. What is the valuable thing the Helper gives us?
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1. What are some good things you have to give up, so that you can have other good things?
 2. In what ways have you seen the world try to take down God's Word?
 3. Is it a good thing when the Spirit comes to convict the world?
 4. Share how God has given you just as much as you can take throughout your life.