

Time of Grace Ministry
Come To the Upper Room: And Be Comforted
John 14:25-27
March 12, 2017

Pastor Mike Novotny

Welcome to Time of Grace! My name is Pastor Mike Novotny. I serve at The Core; a Lutheran church in downtown Appleton, Wisconsin.

Today in the program, Pastor Mark Jeske is going to take us once more to the upper room; that incredible Thursday night when Jesus spoke so many beautiful words to his disciples and gave them so many incredible gifts. And Jesus is going to give us a word of comfort; he's going to talk to us today about the Holy Spirit. Pastor Mark Jeske is going to explain exactly what the Holy Spirit does and the great comfort and counsel we received from the gift that Jesus gave; the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Mark Jeske

One of the most grievous wounds that the Christian church ever had to endure was the breaking up of the church in the ancient world into east and west. The eastern end of the Mediterranean was predominately Greek speaking – at least as a second language – the language, of course, of the New Testament. That is where in the first centuries the church grew most rapidly. That's where the missionary journeys of St. Paul took place. The western part of the Mediterranean was often called the Latin world because of the Roman Empire; they spoke Latin.

Then in the 500s in the western part of the church, Christians began – for reasons that are a little murky – to add a few words to the Nicene Creed. In the third article of the Nicene Creed, it begins, “And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Those words, “and the Son,” were not in the original Nicene Creed when it received what was thought to be final form in Constantinople in 381 and it had a Latin addition. The Latin words for “and the Son,” “Filioque” and that little nickname has given its identity to this argument. And you might think, “Well, okay, this is just a bunch of theologians arguing over some little tiny little sliver,” like, “Get over it, okay guys? Can't you just play nice in the sandbox with each other?” Well in the eastern Christians' minds – what are now called the orthodox Christians – that's holy tradition. You can't mess with holy tradition.

I would like to talk to you a little bit about the promises Jesus made because this phrase that was such a fishbone in the throat, a huge fishbone, like a shark bone, in the throat of these eastern Christians actually had risen originally as words of mercy and kindness from Jesus. Isn't this crazy? That in other words, a gift turned into a reason to fight.

I'd like to invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to one of two major places in Scripture where that filioque, where that “and the Son,” idea came from. And it's not that the Catholic theologians were such idiots, it's just the way they did it is what made it so bad and the fact that they did not respect the consciences of their orthodox brothers and sisters in the east.

Turn to John 14 and we're going to take another little visit to the upper room. And I'd like to go with you now to chapter 14 and if you let your eye slide down the page about to verse 25, Jesus had predicted Judas' betrayal, he predicted Peter's denial, he was talking about the attacks of the evil one. Last week, I did the Bible study with you about coming to the upper room for a warning and letting Jesus warn you. He said to Peter, "Satan, Simon Peter, he Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, Simon. But after you have been restored, restore your brothers." So actually he said, the Father, the Spirit and I, we're going to let Satan tempt you for your own growth. You have to choose to follow me. We can't manipulate you or don't want to manipulate you like a puppet. You have got to choose it for yourself and that means we are going to let you make up your own mind. But you're going to fail. He's going to sift you like wheat and unfortunately, he's going to sift you right out. But you can be restored. We'll put you back on your feet and then you can be valuable in helping others.

Now here comes some words of comfort and some words of sweet promise for his disciples and all of the people of God who are going to fall into the clutches of the evil one and have to struggle in a struggle for their soul over what's going on in their heart and in their mind.

In verse 25 Jesus said, "All this I have spoken while still with you." And he's getting them ready because basically their seminary training was just about done. They were in their final year of training, their final month. In fact, literally their final days of hands on training and he's about ready to send them out into the world. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name," see there's the filioque; that the Spirit comes out of and is sent by the Father but also with Jesus. This is the point that those Latin theologians had tried to make: That the Holy Spirit is not disconnected from Christ but the trinity all works together and everything flows right through – if it flows through one it flows through them all. And what Jesus intended is that this would be great comfort.

The word translated in English here is counselor is not bad; that's not a bad translation of a Greek word, parakletos, which is almost untranslatable. What it really means is to be a coach. It means to do for you what coaches do for their athletes. Now how can you sum up a coach's function in one word? Very hard to do, isn't it? Coaches, first of all, teach you the game. They train you with repetitive exercises to get your head into your role so you know what your job is. They ruthlessly work you out to tune up your body and get your body as strong and flexible and agile as possible. When they see you dogging it and being lazy, they will yell at you. They will scream at you to get moving and they'll be merciless at you like a marine drill sergeant. They're being cruel to make you better. But also when they see you suffer a reverse or a defeat, they'll be the first ones there to put their arm around you and give you some consolation. What they're looking for is your effort and they will be there to encourage you when you struggle. They'll be the ones clapping for you with a stopwatch when it's getting dark and you're still practicing. And they're the ones hollering faster, "Come on, you can do it! Come on, you can do it! Come on, you can do it!" And that is a beautiful description of what a parakletos does for us; what the Holy Spirit does for you and for me. He does all those things for us and he does it through the word.

See, Jesus was preparing the disciples for his absence. How can separation be a good thing? How in any possible way could Jesus' departure – first his death and then he's going to rise again – so he's going to leave them once, come back briefly, and then ascend into heaven. How on earth is that good news for the disciples? They hated that! They were sick when he would talk like that. And he said it's better for you if I do, seriously, because the Holy Spirit and I are going to kind of trade places in advancing the agenda. Neither of us is leaving you. I'm not abandoning you. But there is something coming that isn't going to happen until I step to the side. It's not going to diminish Christ in any way but he said I need to leave so that the Spirit can come.

Now the Holy Spirit was always there. The Old Testament is full of references to the Spirit of the Lord. And Jesus is going to leave but he's not going to leave his presence; just his physical presence will leave. Jesus told his disciples, "I will be with you always to the very end of the age." So Jesus and the Spirit have always been there for the people of God. But what's going to change here is right now Jesus is driving the agenda and he's the focal point. Starting with the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is going to come – not that he never was there – but he's going to come with unusual and extra gifts. Not just to flow into the people as he had but to have an outpouring, a gusher, to help this transition into what we call the New Testament era. And that's what Jesus is telling his disciples you can count on. You are going to be sifted and tested. Your work and ministry ahead will be hard. You will encounter a lot of resistance. He actually predicted the abuse they were going to get from their family and from their society, from their friends, and they would face a lot of opposition and resentment and hostility. But he said, "It's all good." Those aren't signs of failure. That just means if people did that to me and I'm your master, how will they not do that to you, as well? Relax. Just relax. It's all part of the plan. And this is how the Father's agenda will be carried out.

"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name," is going to do two things. He's going to "Teach you all things," and he's going to "remind you of everything I've said to you." Teaching and reminding. The Spirit functions through the word; that's his vehicle. Wherever the word of God is, the Holy Spirit is fluttering around and you might see a few dove feathers on the ground after you've finished your Bible study. You might feel a little puff of the holy wind, the breath, spirit, on your cheek. Every time you read the Bible, you will hear the words of God himself as the Spirit whispers them to you. If you want to know what's on God's mind, just get into the word and the Spirit will tell you what's on God's mind. Don't call God remote and inaccessible; he dumps the bag to you but you won't know it if you don't get into it. Everything we really need to know about God is in the Scripture but it's revealed knowledge; you don't have it in you by nature. Other than your conscience, which is a little moral compass that tells you when you are doing something in alignment with God's will, you feel good. Even people who have never cracked a Bible feel good when they do something in alignment with God. And when they do something against God's will, they feel guilt. Even total unbelievers feel guilt; they know guilt because of their conscience but they don't know a thing to do about it and they don't know a thing about the God who made them.

You know, one of the most – sorry to go on a little bit of a rant here – but one of the most famous magazines anywhere of all time is the one with completely yellow borders around it, kind of rectangular, kind of thick and heavy, always printed on glossy paper. You know what

I'm talking about. The National Geographic. And I was reading one article the other day about eyes, animal eyes, and all the amazing incredible variety in the animal kingdom of how people receive visual information and how it's then translated through the wiring inside their little heads, in the insect world for instance, and gets to become useful information for them to feed and to reproduce, to find one another, and to interact with the wider world. And there were gigantic close up photographs, for instance, of let's say fly eyes, which are made up of literally hundreds or even thousands of tiny lenses that enable them to see almost in all directions at the same time. And at first I was infuriated by the gibberish narrative that went with it explaining how all by itself these like protoplasm had morphed itself – with no guidance or design or blueprints – morphed itself into these insanely complex miracles of design and engineering and I thought, "How can you say such ridiculous gibberish? That's there's no designer? That it all just sort of happened?" Like the flies needed to see where they were flying so their tissue invented eyes so they could see. Is that like, "What?"

And then it dawned on me I'm judging them as though they had the Spirit of the Lord. That writer did not have the Spirit to teach them and to remind them. Unless the knowledge of God is revealed to you, you have no idea where you came from, what you're doing here, what is the purpose of your life, is there a mission, is there meaning? Are there absolute standards for my behavior or am I pretty much on my own to do whatever I can get away with? And where am I going? Is there any objective information out there for me? Aside from the Bible, there is none. And so it calmed me down as I realized the best possible thing I could do with that writer is go have some coffee someplace and let him have a little bit of the word. He can't figure it out – or she; I don't remember the gender of the writer – they can't figure it out because it's not been revealed to them. So they grasp for any explanation of whatever's left. And if you leave God out of the description of where did the universe come from, where did the human race come from, what are we doing here and where are we going, and you cut God and the Bible out of it, all you've got left is a bunch of cockamamie notions that make no sense whatsoever but that's all that's left so people believe what seems to them the most rational of what's left. And the fact that it's nonsense means, "Well, my nonsense is as good as your nonsense." But still, you are disconnected from God. The Spirit that Jesus promised connects you to God, connects you to the truth, tells you the truth about yourself, why it is that your life is so hard, why it is that you feel pain, and why it is that you're dying. But it also tells you how precious you are, it tells you you're created and designed by the great Master above, tells you that you matter to him, that you have value. That you did not invent yourself, that you were made, designed and built. That you were made for a purpose to have connections with each other. You were made to bond to other people and you were made even more importantly to bond to him. And that you have been given a mission and an agenda for your life, which is not to enrich yourself – God may or may not give you material treasures and he frankly gets his job done, his mission, done in you either way. Sometimes he's spoils you by giving you plenty and sometimes he toughens you up by taking things away from you. He can work – God works his math both by addition and subtraction; sometimes by multiplication and division. But his main mission for you is to be connected to him and then to be connected with each other.

And all the stuff happening to you is all part of that agenda and Jesus wanted his disciples not to panic. He said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I don't give to you as the world gives. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't be afraid." Some of them sitting here just a short

time later are going to watch the stoning of Stephen. They're going to see it and hear about it. Don't let your heart be troubled when the rocks are slamming into Stephen. Don't let your heart be troubled when one of them finally hits his head with such force that it kills him. James, the apostle James, who's listening to this doesn't know it but he's in basically the last months of his life. He's going to be beheaded not long after this upper room event. Don't let your heart be troubled, James. You'll be dead soon.

And you think what? If you knew that you were going to be beheaded in a few months, wouldn't your heart be troubled? Jesus, what are you saying? What he's saying is the length of your life is nothing compared to eternity. Whether you live a few more months on this earth is utterly meaningless in the vast reach of eternity; time without limit, time without end. What matters is what you do with what you've got right now. What matters is how aligned am I with God's plan for me and his opportunities for me?

All the disciples – with the exception possibly of John – were going to become martyrs. Jesus is saying, “Don't let your heart be troubled. That's not a defeat. That's not a loss.” You will not die one minute sooner than your agenda, your mission, for your life has been going. Your mission must be completed before I will allow you to pass away. Relax. Don't let your heart be troubled. I have overcome the world for the death of Christ himself was not a disaster as he was abused. Don't let your heart be troubled, disciples, when you see me arrested. Relax. It's part of the plan. Don't let your heart be troubled when you see me rejected and condemned. Don't let your heart be troubled when you see me flogged and whipped. Don't let your heart be troubled when you see me hauled up and nailed to a cross; you see the blood coming from me. John was going to be close enough to see the blood coming out of his face from the crown of thorns. Don't let your heart be troubled. What? How could your heart not be sick at what you're seeing? Don't let your heart be troubled. It's all good. Don't let your heart be troubled when I ascend into heaven for I'm sending the Counselor who's going to make you strong. He's going to explain what's been going on and he will remind you of all the stuff you forgot and fit it together so that it will make sense for you and give you a framework for living your life and doing your God-given ministry to connect with people as you are, where you are, where he's placed you.

My peace I give you. Just exhale. You know, just let that peace flow through you. Through the work of the Son of God, you now have God's favor upon you. God smiles when he looks at you. You may enjoy the feeling of being precious and valuable. Only Jesus could say that because frankly, some stuff about God is kind of creepy, isn't it? Do you want his burning, holy eyeballs on you all the time? Seeing every stupid thing you've ever done? Hearing every dumb word that's come out of your mouth? Doesn't that make you kind of squirm when you think that he sees everything? I don't even want to go into all the stuff because I don't want to like freak you out but he's seeing everything you've done in your life. The stuff you're ashamed of that you hope nobody else ever finds out about you – and God saw it all. Is that creepy? Is that scary? Does that make you want to run away? Does it make you want to hide? Does it make you feel unworthy? The blood of Jesus washes it away so that God sees and knows all those things and has decided they are now irrelevant in the trial through which you will pass when you die.

I don't have to go through a trial where all my foolish misdeeds are going to be put on display for the world and I'm going to step through the gate sideways to roaring applause, Jesus smiling and saying, "Well done good and faithful servant." I'm going to be looking around going like, "Who are you talking to?" and it's going to be me! And that's going to be you! Relax. Let his peace flow through you. It's all good.

The stuff he sends in your life is all good. He spoils you with stuff to encourage you to be generous hoping you don't become addicted to it and he takes things away from you not to beat you down, not because it's a judgment, you're not getting punished for your sins. If you suffer a financial reverse, if your health gets really bad and if you lose your ability to walk gracefully and you start to limp or you slow down to the point where you need some kind of piece of machinery to move around, that's not a sign of punishment. It's just part of the mess we all have to slide through to get to the entrance gates to paradise where an army of people we love are waiting and where the Father is smiling and the Son is saying, "Welcome home. You made it!"

Let his peace flow through you. If he can say that to the disciples who were facing – going to be facing severe temptation, just relax about whatever is going on in your life and let the Spirit through his word help you see and believe how precious you are, that you are loved and forgiven of all your sins, that your life really matters to God, that he does not judge you on the basis of how much wealth you have or how much stuff you've been able to collect or how much power you have over other people or how prestigious you are or how many people know your name. Utterly irrelevant to God. He just wants to know have you been useful to him? Have you spoken my name so that other fools and sinners might hear of my peace? And then enter into the joy of your Lord. And the Counselor, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is the one who guarantees this for you. Don't listen to me. Let the Spirit speak to you through his word.

This is good news for God's people!

Pastor Mike Novotny

The other day, one of my friends used a phrase that I haven't forgotten since. He said he was struggling with "Christian guilt." That meant he knew he was a Christian, he knew that Jesus died for him, and yet, he still carried this guilt with him of the sins he couldn't shake.

Now, I thought about something I heard way back in my schooling days about the times when we should turn to certain parts of God's word and times when we should turn to certain other parts of God's word. There are occasions in life when we should really think about ourselves and the commandments of God and our obedience; the law of God. And there's other times when we shouldn't think at all about that and instead just think about Jesus and grace and mercy and forgiveness.

I think what my friend was struggling with is pretty common. We fall into a sin and we think about ourselves and what we can do and how we can improve and we're so self-focused that we lose hope and we lose joy and we lose peace. But whenever sin has done its work in our hearts and the law has convicted us, there's only one place to go and it's not back to ourselves, it's not back to the law. Instead, it's just to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ.

I've learned as a pastor over the years that people so quickly want to say, "Yeah, I know, that pastor," and then go back to their obedience. But what God is asking us to do once the law has convicted our hearts is to sit for a long time and meditate on the great grace of our Savior Jesus. It's only then that the heart is stirred. It's only then that we love God more and more. It's only then that Christ's love compels us not to live for ourselves but for the one who died for us and was raised again.

Would you join me today and pray?

Dear Holy Spirit,

We pray to you today because you are God and because we need the comfort that only you can give. Fix our eyes on Jesus. Sanctify our hearts and remind us that we are holy because of what Jesus has done. When the law has done its work deep within us, help us not give into that temptation to turn back to the wrong passages in Scripture but instead to think about the crazy gospel, the good news, that is proclaimed on the pages that you yourself inspired.

Would you guide us, Holy Spirit? Counsel us and give us wisdom. As we face questions right now that we can't answer, temptations that we can't resist without you, we are so desperate for your help, so help us. In your mercy, fill our hearts and overflow into our lives. We pray these things with boldness because you have pointed us to the one in whom every answer to prayer is yes. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Once again, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny. Thank you for joining us this week on Time of Grace. We'll catch you next time – it all starts now!



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Come to the Upper Room and Be Comforted

John 14:25-27: ²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, 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.”

Points to Ponder

1. Read John 14:25. What is Jesus saying with this verse? What is going to happen soon?
2. In this Bible translation the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate. What other words could you use to describe the Holy Spirit and his work on our behalf?
3. In this section of Scripture, what is Jesus preparing his disciples for? Why?
4. Though Jesus would no longer be with the disciples physically, what gifts did he give them through the Holy Spirit?
5. No matter what befalls us on this earth, why can we be at peace and not afraid?

As Jesus was close to the end of his life, he reassured his disciples that he would be with them always. He also promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would teach them and remind them of what Jesus told them. All of this is true for us as well. And though life isn't always easy, as the disciples would find out after Jesus' death and resurrection, we can be at peace knowing that Jesus' work for us is complete and heaven is ours through faith in him.

What else does God say?

Isaiah 59:21: "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever," says the LORD.

Acts 2:38,29: Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.