



## The Promise of the Spirit

John 14:16-20

Grace Church | 5.7.23

There are few things more beautiful than the love of a true friend. Part of the reason is that true friendship is incredibly rare. In *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis attributes the modern loss of the value of friendship to it being the most “unnatural” or least “biological” of loves.<sup>1</sup> Friendship is not something that comes easy to us. We are knitted together with family naturally, we are drawn in romantic love almost like magnets, but friendship requires work, it requires choice, it requires virtue. At first glance, it feels unnecessary even. We need familial love and romantic love, because without them we wouldn’t even be here, we would not have been born or raised! But true friendship feels like an add on, a luxury.

And yet, it’s the one thing we cannot live without. To be without a spouse is not to live in a state of insufficiency. To live without parents is sorrowful, but not insurmountable. Yet no one can live without a friend. As Proverbs 7:17 tells us, “A friend loves at *all* times”. A friend is not driven to love by familial bond or covenant, but by choice. That is unique, and beautiful.

The love of true friendship found its truest expression in Jesus Christ. He is the friend of friends. He never married—he chose his friends. And he was a true friend, because as John Newton writes:

Which of all our friends, to save us, could or would have shed his blood? But our Jesus died to have us reconciled in him to God. This was boundless love indeed; Jesus is a Friend in need.<sup>2</sup>

We all want a friend like that. What would it be like to have Jesus as our friend? We can ask the disciples of Jesus. They got to know Jesus intimately over the course of several years, walking, talking, joking, eating, working alongside him. He was not just their master or teacher. Before his death, as they ate together one last time, he told them: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” In other words, they have become friends of Jesus because he has let them in on his secrets, the secrets of God.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

<sup>2</sup> John Newton, “Christ, a True Friend”



These men loved Jesus, and he loved them. In becoming friends with him, they were becoming friends of God. Jesus was their life, the one they had given everything for. But at this feast with his friends before his death, he starts to act a little strange. First, he washes their feet: a sign of servitude. Then, he starts to speak of how he is leaving, going away. Judas, one of the friends, leaves in a rush as Jesus prophesies that he will betray him. He even tells of how Peter and the rest of the disciples will deny him or leave him. His friends start to get uneasy.

But as Jesus prepares to leave his disciples, to go to the cross and his appointed suffering and death, he doesn't write them a goodbye note. Instead, he says things like: "You will see me again" and "I am with you always, to the end". In other words, he promises his friends that he will continue to be as intimate as ever with them. This is not the sentimental promise of a deceased loved one "living in our memories", but a promise of actual, realized presence. Even more than that, he promises that all who believe in him would receive his love, his friendship. We have never seen Jesus, and yet he can be real and present to us? How is this possible?

Because when Jesus goes to his death and resurrection and ascension, what we might call his *exaltation*, he promises to send his Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

This is our fourth week in our sermon series on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We have seen that the Spirit is at work in creation, breathing God's breath into us and making us spiritual beings. We learned that the Spirit's work is to call us to our God-given purpose, and last week that the way we hear and understand the Holy Spirit is through the spiritual act of prayer. Today, I have one truth concerning the Holy Spirit and two implications. First, the truth: **The Spirit of Jesus is presently intimate with all those who follow Jesus.**

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Let's look first at **verse 16-17** and we see Jesus promise the Holy Spirit. Now, this is just the first of five passages in the next few chapters of John that mention the Holy Spirit, and they all share differences and similarities.

First importance is that there are differences in how Jesus promises the Spirit. Here, I love the intentionality and intimacy of Jesus' comfort for his disciples in **verse 16**. He will ask the Father to send the Spirit. But in other passages, the Spirit is "sent by the Father in Christ's name (v. 26), sent by Christ from the Father (15:26), proceeds ('goes out') from the Father (15:26), or is sent by Christ (16:7)."<sup>3</sup> None of these are contradictory—the point is that Jesus and the Father are linked. Both the Father and Jesus send the Spirit in complementary ways due to their unity.

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<sup>3</sup> Carson, D. A., *The Gospel according to John*



That is because the Spirit they are talking about, *and this is so important* (kids listen up), is not some impersonal force. The Holy Spirit is not a superpower we receive, not a spiritual charge up. Neither is the Holy Spirit entirely a mystery or unknowable. Often we treat the Spirit in this way—like it is “the Force” from Star Wars, or some sort of physical energy field that animates all things. No—the Holy Spirit is a person—and not simply a tiny little person able to go anywhere. By person, we don’t mean that the Holy Spirit has a body or is physical, but that the Spirit is *personal*, has personality, is definable and knowable. And the reason for this is very simple: the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son. The Spirit is a person because the Father and the Son are: it is *their* Spirit that is sent. The Holy Spirit is the *Spirit of God*, and specifically here, *the Spirit of Jesus*.

There is no great way to illustrate this other than to say that when we say that the Holy Spirit is *present*, what we really, actually mean is that Jesus himself is present. Just as Jesus says that when you see him, you have seen the Father, so we can say that when we have the Spirit, we have Jesus. Let me give you a little more evidence to support this.

In all of these five passages in John, the Holy Spirit is called either the Helper or the Spirit of Truth. Here, he is called both. The word for “helper” is hard to translate. It only appears in the Bible in the work of the apostle John: four times in the gospel of John to refer to the Holy Spirit, and one time in 1 John 2:1,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

You may have missed it, but the word “advocate” in 1 John 2 is the same word for “helper” in John 14-16. So here, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are both described in this way by John. Which might help us to make sense why Jesus says the helper will be “another” helper, and why in **verse 17**, he says that this helper already “dwells with you”. Jesus is comparing and equating himself to the Holy Spirit—he is the helper who already dwells with his disciple.

The word for helper and advocate is *paraklete* in the Greek. Literally it means “one who comes to another’s aid”. In Greek society, this word was used to designate a legal advocate, who represented someone else in court. So if you had legal trouble, a paraklete could speak for you before the court. But the word is different from that of a lawyer, or one appointed as a professional to represent a client’s case. The word instead has the cultural connotation of a personal advocate, a sponsor who voluntarily gives witness or speaks to the character of the one on trial. In other words, a paraklete is not someone who has read your case file and compiled a legal defense. A paraklete is someone who knows you intimately and is able to come to your aid in the time of trouble. A paraklete is someone who “loves at all times”. A paraklete, in not so many words, is a true friend.

Who is the true friend? It’s Jesus. And so Jesus, the true friend, alongside the Father, is sending the friend of friends. He is sending himself, his very Spirit.



The other definition of the Spirit in John is *the Spirit of Truth*. In John's gospel, a lot of ink is spilt on the definition of "the Truth". But the most striking comments on truth come in two places. First, in the prologue, where John calls Jesus Christ "the Word" of God. He goes on to say that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." This is the truth that replaces the law of Moses—it is the very truth of God. Then, just a few verses prior to our passage, in John 14:6, Jesus makes this startling claim to his disciples: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life". What is truth? Jesus is the truth—the very word of God. For the Holy Spirit to be called the Spirit of Truth, then, is to be called the Spirit of Jesus, the one who points back to, bears witness to, and communicates Jesus.

So let me say it simply again, because you must understand this: when Jesus promises his Spirit to his disciples, he is promising it to all who repent of their sin and believe in him. And so if that is you, here is the startling truth: Jesus is here. Look at **verse 20**: he promises his Spirit to be "in us". Your friend, the truth, is here, by his Spirit. You could maybe put it simply like this: the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to create intimacy with Jesus himself.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is no more abstract to you that ground you stand on. He is no more distant than the person sitting next to you. Jesus is present. So what? Let's see two implications: **you are never alone**, and **you are always seen**.

### Implication 1: **You are never alone.**

A few weeks ago for Easter we preached that Jesus has been brought again from the dead, raised to life by God, because his perfect life was indestructible. Death couldn't hold him. Which means he is alive, and will live forever. This is why then the Spirit of Jesus, **verse 16**, is with us forever.

What would it be like for you to walk, talk, eat and work with Jesus? How would his perfect love calm your heart? What do you think it would feel like? Now imagine what it would feel like to lose him. This is the fear Jesus is speaking the promise of his Spirit into.

Hopefully all of us have experienced the love of a true friend, a friend who in their imperfect way showed us glimpses of the perfect Jesus. But the sad part about friendships is that we know, at least in this world, they are not forever. We may be parted by death, or sometimes, they fade over time and distance. Even worse, they may be ripped apart by our own sin or the sin of another. The only thing worse than not having a friend is having a friendship ripped from you when you need it the most.

In a sense, we are used to this. Friendship is so rare, and requires so much work, that we expect nothing to last forever. And all of us have experienced or will experience the great pain of loss: loss

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<sup>4</sup> With the coming of the Counsellor the exalted Jesus would make himself present to his disciples in the here and now. This is a reminder that the function of the Holy Spirit is not restricted to the bestowal of spiritual gifts, or the production of Christian character, but includes the creation of a sense of intimacy with Jesus himself as well. (Colin Kruse, *John*)



of relationship, loss of love. So it makes sense that we would often treat Jesus as if he is our distant, old friend who we have lost. It was good while it lasted. We live our lives as if Jesus is past tense. We used to know him, we used to be closer. But now? Now we live on memory.

Brothers and sisters, nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus lives, and his Spirit is with us *forever*. Death could not take him from us, but as **verse 19** says, he lives! Sin cannot take him from us, because he defeated the power of sin with his perfect love on the cross. Time and distance cannot take him from us—because, as he says in **verse 18**, he will not leave us as orphans. The great anxiety of the orphan is that they would be left to fend for themselves, without support, in a world that is after them.

What is it like to live as an orphan? It's living with low expectations, with an expectation of instability and abandonment, or as one friend described it, in a scarcity mindset. But you have not been abandoned by Jesus. You don't live with an expectation of instability—you live with the expectation and promise that the exact moment you need Jesus, he will be there, forever.

## Implication 2: **You are always seen.**

A true friendship is not something that can be canned. The most beautiful part about friendship is that it can provide the opportunity that you are fully seen for all you are, stripped bare of pretense, and still truly loved. Most of our “friends” are really just companions that we keep around for pleasure or for utility. But true friends know us, in a way that takes time and intentionality to develop.

The interesting thing about Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit is that he also explains who will *not* receive the Holy Spirit. In **verse 17**, he says the “world” cannot receive him. This is a loaded term that basically means those who are in rebellion against God, those who are in their sin. The grace of God is inclusive: it is offered to any who would repent and call upon him. But the gift of the Spirit is exclusive: it's only for those who have received the grace of God. And what that means is that Jesus is personally *yours*. When you believe in Jesus, the gift Jesus gives you that he does not give the world is himself.

Yes, the promise of the Spirit is a communal promise for the church, but the church is collectively the beloved, the bride of Jesus. It's not a club or an organization you are invited into: it's a friendship, a relationship with Jesus. Notice the personal nature of **verse 19**, “*you will see me.*” To see Jesus means that he is close and near—and to see him looking back. All throughout his ministry, Jesus saw people others passed by: sinners, poor, needy, outcasts. He looks, sees them, takes them in, gives them grace, brings them into his friendship, and promises that eye-to-eye contact will never be broken. He sees you—you are his beloved.

Notice too the joy of the Spirit indwelling us. In Jesus' incarnation he limited his presence to the space he was in. But we have Jesus' Spirit—he can be equally present with all of us. There is more



than enough Jesus to go around. The gift of intimacy with Jesus is for you, you don't have to share Jesus with everyone else. You are "in Jesus" by the Spirit. You don't need an appointment.

At times, we'd like to imagine that we can hide from Jesus. Maybe we want to: we feel guilty, ashamed, or simply want to indulge in the kinds of things we believe will make Jesus uncomfortable. Maybe we want to hide because in our pain and suffering, we really doubt Jesus can understand or care, or wants to be around us. Children, up to a certain point, are very bad at hiding. That is what hiding from Jesus is like. But here I want you to see as good news: if the Spirit of Jesus indwells you, you can't play hide and seek from Jesus. It's good news because the Spirit of God isn't the Spirit of judgment if you are in Jesus—it's the spirit of help, the spirit of friendship, the spirit of advocacy, the spirit of truth, the spirit of comfort.

There are many moments in our life where we feel alone and unseen. But the very darkest place you could go, the place of utter loneliness, is the last place you go: death. No one gets into the coffin with you. No one sees you anymore when you lie buried. But here is the great truth of the gospel: Jesus already went there. He went into the coffin with you, he sees you in the grave. He went willingly to the cross, to die for his friends, to bleed out and love you to the end. He went to his own tomb, was unseen and utterly alone. He did it so that through the grave he might associate with you in your mortality, to taste death for you, and to take on himself the punishment of death that your sin deserved. And he did it for *you*, not a number on a spreadsheet—he brought names to the cross.<sup>5</sup> He did it so that David's cry is our cry:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

But even more than David, **verse 19** is our cry. Because Jesus lives, we also will live. Jesus is with us in our death so that by his Spirit we can be with him in his eternal life. This means that now, presently, not later, you are alive and with Jesus. You are never alone, you are always seen: you are alive with the Spirit of Jesus.

There are few things more beautiful than the love of a true friend. Jesus is the truest friend. And even now, if you turn to Jesus, Jesus' Spirit is with you. You are never alone, and you are always seen.

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<sup>5</sup> "I don't know what your theology of the Cross is, so I want to make sure we get it right. When Jesus went to the Cross, He didn't purchase the "possibility of salvation" - as if, His death opened the door for people to walk through later in life, if they so chose. No, Jesus took names to the Cross." Paul Tripp, <https://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/everything-you-need-freedom>

