



Holy Spirit #5

Comforter and Teacher

w/c 2 June 2024

"If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair." (C. S. Lewis)

The human race likes comfort (or least the absence of discomfort). It's a common theme too in the bible. But are we looking for the same thing as God is promising? What do you understand by 'comfort'?

Read John 14:26–27 & 16:7b–15

Depending on the version used, you may have been introduced (in verse 26) to the idea of a comforter, an advocate, a helper, a counsellor, a friend, a companion, or even, simply, someone to stand by you. All are attempts to translate the original Παράκλητος – literally "someone who is called to come alongside someone else." In Greek culture, it would have referred to someone a bit like a family lawyer.

How do you feel about this picture of God being alongside us, as compared to the perhaps more usual image of indwelling? If we look back to verse 16, we gain the further insight that Jesus is not talking about someone different, but, as one commentator put it, *"One like myself, who will take my place, do my work"*. Jesus emphasised this continuity when he went on to promise them that, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* (John 14:18).

As we look through the New Testament's promises of 'comfort', we find that the Greek, *paraklesis*, is a term that can be translated in various ways – while often rendered as comfort it is just as often translated as exhortation or encouragement. It has the same fundamental roots as *paraclete* – a coming alongside others to aid them. See for example, 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and Romans 12:8. A further example of God being by our side is Jesus' promise to the weary (Matthew 11:28–30). How do you feel at this description of support, remembering that the yoke implied is, I've read, one jointly carried? It's the master and disciple relationship.

At the heart of God's comfort is his presence – the Holy Spirit as 'paraclete'. Our not being alone but being embraced by the creator of all who loves us, forgives us and accepts us. That accompanying on our journey is also surely at the heart of the Spirit being our teacher. In John 16:13 Jesus promises us that we will be guided *"into all the truth"*. The word for guide is for one who leads – we only go where he has gone before. We should note that in verse 23, Jesus describes what the Spirit will bring us as being *"my teaching"*. Look across the chapter and see how it describes the nature of the Trinity – three in one and one in three.

Finally, think through the reason for our being taught, it's not knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Rather, as King David put it (Psalm 25:4) it's that we might understand the ways of God. That must have been a key aspect for the very early church – Luke describes those who follow Jesus as being followers of the "Way". See Acts 9:2, 19:23 and 24:14 for examples of its use. The purpose of discipleship is to become like our master. *"What would Jesus do?"* is actually pertinent. How often do we ask that question?

Rather than look through the whole of our second reading, I'd like to focus on just one verse – Psalm 34:8 – *"Taste and see that the Lord is good;"*. This was clearly a concept that resonated for the early church as we find two New Testament writers making use of it – 1 Peter 2:3 and Hebrews 6:4–5. These all seem to use taste in the sense of trying something. The key for us is to allow the Holy Spirit to move us on from that to maturity. How do you feel that can be accomplished?

*"O taste and see that he is good; experience will decide
how blest are they, and only they who in the LORD confide."*

(From *Through all the changing scenes of life*; Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady; 1696)