

*The Paraclete: Advocate, Counselor, Worker*

Proverbs 8: 19-31    John 16: 5-15

Good teachers are memorable for us, not simply because of the value of their lessons, their teaching style, but also their level of caring and interest. William A. Ward, a noted source of inspirational quotes, said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

One of my students in my last class at the prison gave a talk at the Gavel Club on an evening that I had missed. He explained how much he had enjoyed the Life Mapping class. After a few sessions, he felt that he was getting a lot of attention from me as the teacher. He began to think of himself as the teacher's pet and was feeling pretty good about his special status. Then one evening in class, he saw the way that I was engaging each student, and he realized that in the Life Mapping class, **every** student was the teacher's pet. I took that as a nice compliment since I would hope that every student felt that I had that keen interest in their success.

A stupid development in public education has been the mandate for testing to measure education, as in measuring student learning and measuring teachers' teaching ability. In a methodology resuscitated from the industrial age, standardized testing has become the yardstick for performance in education. Standardization worked very well for Henry Ford and the automobile assembly plant, and it works in McDonald's menu selections. Standardization does not work in education. However, history has shown that no matter how much an idea fails, the ability to recognize failure and stop doing it is a whole other matter.

Standardized testing is nothing new. They were administering standardized tests when I was a kid, and probably when you were a kid. However, they were used as an evaluative tool. Now these tests are being used to measure performance of the student and the teacher and the school. One test. This means that if successful teachers are measured by testing, then teachers are going to teach testing in order to be successful. What's lost is the idea of students learning.

I think everyone apart from the education establishment in Washington and a bunch of elected leaders who are driven by the money game, either Federal dollars or by lobbyist donations – apart from those folks, everyone else realizes that educational achievement is much more than what's measured on any standardized test.

Over 20 years ago, an acclaimed movie came out called "Mr. Holland's Opus." It was a public school music teacher who had ambitions of creating a masterwork composition, having it published and performed. However, life events and career demands and life's myriad distractions prevented him from ever completing his masterwork symphony. Forced out amid budget cuts to music and theater programs, something familiar to Marion County, he closes his 35 year career believing that he

failed in his life, never having produced the opus of which he knew he was capable, and his life in music education not over.

As he cleans out his office after the school year ends, being reminded of all the things that kept him from his lifelong dream and achievement, he is drawn to the auditorium where music is playing, and yet he knows of no musical event scheduled to occur. It's the last day of school, of course. As he enters, he's greeted with a student assembly to honor his life's work in teaching. Testimonials pour out from the former students who returned to give credit to Mr. Holland who was a teacher who taught them life lessons and supported them in difficult times and excelled at innovating in music to touch many lives.

His orchestral piece, which had never been played before, is to be presented by the school orchestra, and he is asked to be the conductor. In this sequence, Mr. Holland realizes that his masterwork is not the symphony he created in music composition, but the symphony of young lives he had touched forever with his passion for teaching and for his students.

We know that Jesus has spent a major portion of his ministry seeking to teach his disciples his way, the Kingdom way, of God's promise in faithfulness. If Jesus had been a public school teacher today, he probably would have been fired. The disciples were notorious for neglecting the things that Jesus had been teaching them. His students had a tendency to fall flat on their face more often than not, and their ability to be effective witnesses of Jesus' ministry appears highly doubtful.

In John 16, as Jesus is giving his final discourse to his disciples, he seems to admit in several places that his students are not yet ready for prime time. He begins our passage by saying: *But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?"* This would seem to be a normal question, but these folks apparently haven't been listening. Now that's a problem.

Jesus doesn't let their failure to ask the question prevent him from answering the question that they **should** have asked, but didn't: *It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.* Jesus seems to realize that they're going to need some significant help once he's gone.

Here, Jesus gives the term that's in the sermon title, *the Paraclete*. "Paraclete" is the Greek word that simply doesn't translate too well. The NIV pew Bible translates it as "Counselor," but the NRSV translates it as "Advocate." It seems that Counselor is rather passive, whereas Advocate is much more active and engaged. This seems required since what the Paraclete will be doing is described as a high level of engagement.

Here is what the Paraclete will be doing: *And when [the Paraclete] comes, [the Paraclete] will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going*

*to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.*

Rather than counseling, the Paraclete will be teaching the world, calling it to new understanding of what has happened. The Paraclete will continue to teach as Jesus taught about the nature of sin as God's sees it, not what the world and tradition and corrupt teachings regard as sinfulness. The Paraclete will teach about righteousness, because Jesus is not forsaken by God as a blasphemer who gets cruelly crucified. Rather Jesus goes to be at the right hand of God, his Father. And finally, the Paraclete will teach about judgment because the evil attempt to take away Jesus' life by crucifixion gets overturned with the resurrection. The power in the ruler of the world gets exposed as weak and irrelevant by Jesus and his resurrection. So, the Paraclete has a lot of advocating to do.

Clearly, the lessons that Jesus had begun will continue as the Paraclete does counseling, teaching, and advocating in Jesus' name.

In another instance of Jesus' lack of confidence in his lessons and the disciples' ability to learn them, Jesus says: *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*

Jesus' time in earthly ministry is drawing to a conclusion, whether the disciples are ready or not. Jesus' physical presence may depart, but his word and his spirituality and his way continue as the Advocate and Counselor and Teacher – the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete – comes to engage in ministry with disciples forever.

The notion of the Spirit of God as a distinct person and presence of God pops up from time to time in the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament, long before Jesus, and way long before the church develops the doctrine of the trinity. The best, most familiar and most detailed presentation is in Proverbs 8.

It starts by asking listeners if they've actually heard Wisdom calling out, raising her voice. Yes, Wisdom – the Spirit of God – is feminine; she has been called Lady Wisdom. That draws from the Greek where Sophia is sacred Wisdom, the feminine. That's a side of God many don't care to see. And that can do real damage to one's imaginings about the Trinity by add a female person to the three persons of God. Yeah, those Trinity synapses in your brain are just about burned out, aren't they? Good.

In the Proverbs reading, Wisdom is distressed, urgently beckoning to humanity while mortals choose other paths besides the sacred. Eugene Peterson in his common language Bible paraphrase "The Message" puts this proverb bluntly and accurately: *Right in the city square, where traffic is thickest, Lady Wisdom shouts, "You – I'm talking to all of you, everyone out here on the streets! Listen, you idiots – learn good sense! You blockheads – shape up!"* Lady Wisdom has an attitude.

As people live their lives, they haven't been listening for Lady Wisdom. She could be yelling at the disciples of Jesus, both ancient and modern. Instead, everybody has been chasing vain and futile pursuits; we're all acting like blockheads.

In today's selection, we also hear how Wisdom was there in the beginning at creation. Remember how the Spirit is mentioned in Genesis 12; how the Spirit of God was amid the darkness and "hovering over the waters." As is stated here in Proverbs 8, the Spirit-Wisdom *predated* the creation, *predating* the dark, the deep, and the waters.

We're reminded that Spirit-Wisdom was the *master worker* in vs. 30, enabling God's design of creation to take form and substance. We note that Jesus is promising the Paraclete to his disciples in the same form and fashion. The Paraclete will be the "master worker" of God's **new creation** that comes through Jesus, through his disciples working in ministry to advance the Kingdom.

In the Paraclete, the disciples will gain the Advocate who will empower them to challenge the world's beliefs and assumptions with new ways formed in grace and peace, with justice and equity, and amid the power and promise of new life. The Paraclete will also be the Counselor who upholds the disciples in the difficult times when faith gets tested and tried, when doubt and dismay afflict, and when fear and death cast their shadow. The Paraclete will also be the Master Worker who interprets the designs of the Father and the Son to the disciples, who strives to empower the witnesses and the ministries, who instills the bold vision that seeks the triumph of the Lord and the ways of his Kingdom in all things.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost means that the ministry of Jesus will be empowered to move in the directions of his teaching and counsel in every age. It will remain vital and compelling in every age when the disciples of the way of Jesus seek the Holy Spirit to discern how they should understand the Lord's will in each new era of human history. Jesus knew that his teachings could only go so far with his disciples, and then with the disciples coming after. He knew that the Holy Spirit would be the bridge between our Savior and his ongoing ministry in the world through us.

By the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit with us, we know that Jesus' teachings are not words on a page, but the revelation of the way of truth and new life. They are not frozen in time, artifacts of an ancient era, or dictates that require literal understanding that is oblivious to changing times and new awareness. This blessing is ours, and makes our ministry in Jesus' name empowered and vital, now as it was when Jesus was with us. Praise the Lord for this amazing gift for his disciples in every age.