

There is today a new interest in the Holy Spirit. Many portions of the church seem to stand on the edge of renewal under the activity of the Spirit in the lives of its members. Today I want to introduce you to a word, probably new to most of you. But first let me note 4 verses from the gospel of John, according to Today's English Version:

John 14:16 - I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, the Spirit of truth to stay with you forever.

John 14:26 - The Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and make you remember all that I have told you.

John 15:26 - The Helper will come - the Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father. I will send him from the Father, and he will speak about me.

John 16:7 - But I tell you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come.

Each time John uses the word paraclete where the TEV translates Helper. The word is sometimes translated as counselor, comforter, intercessor, advocate. None of them are really satisfactory.

because 'paraclete' really means "One called to our side to help". For example, you are struggling with a burden and someone steps in and puts an arm and shoulder under it and helps you bear it . . . someone called alongside to help. That is what paraclete means.

Why is it important? Because it helps to define the reality of the Holy Spirit, the continuing power and presence of God available to each of us in the now. Jesus was affirming to his disciples that even though his physical presence would be gone there would be an invisible presence of power within them and beside them.

Perhaps a story will point toward what we are saying. One mother as she put her child to bed each night told him the exciting stories of the OT - about Joseph, and Moses, ~~and David~~, and Daniel, and Jonah. One evening when she was telling him the story of David and Goliath, the child interrupted with "But Mom, what is God doing now?".

It's true. Too often we limit our thinking about God to his activities told about in the Bible..back then. He did indeed act then, but he is acting now. The paraclete is God at work in our lives and ~~is~~ in our world today.

Oral Roberts says that his ministry was ineffective until he accepted this understanding. "I don't have to see Jesus as a physical man. God has filled me with the Holy Spirit. I have that comforted, the paraclete. The one called alongside to help. It's as if Jesus is walking by me in the flesh. Except he is in his invisible unlimited form inside me. He is in me. Therefore ^{he} ~~we~~ can do all things thru me. This is the key that opened the lock to my healing ministry. He was saying to me 'Oral, you can do it because I am in you and I am with you.'"

A famous opera singer was asked the secret of his power and authority in singing. He answered "A long time ago I was given understanding by a master teacher that there was a ^{natural} ~~spiritual~~ little me and a ^{spiritual} big me within me. The ^{natural} little me is fearful, superstitious and weak; when I go on stage I repeat over and over again 'Big me, come forth from within and sing' The ^{spiritual} big me has never let me down. In Christian usage the ^{spiritual} big me is the paraclete.

What do we do about this power of God? The answer is so simple that the sophisticated miss or reject it; you yield to the ^{spiritual} big me within, you believe in the ^{spiritual} big me with, and you appropriate the ^{big} me within.

Paul Tillich, gives us help in acquiring this paraclete power. He said the divine spirit is with ^{it} in every human being - it is commitment and love of Christ which activates and releases the power to the maximum.

A young woman says: For many years I was unsuccessful in making ^fmy husband happy, I felt guilty because I was a failure. Then, one day, after pondering the scripture about losing yourself to find yourself, the change came; I just openly admitted that I can't make anybody happy - that God's job. Anyway, I asked God for help. For the first time I really trusted him. Call it a miracle but it happened. I quit pushing and my husband started coming to me. Why is it that people keep struggling so long ththinking they can do it on their own?"

I would turn the question around: Why do you hold on so long to the old ways of the ^{nature} little me?

A family once had one expensive possession, a rare vase they prized. One day, their little son, who had been cautioned never to touch the vase, got his hand caught inside. The upset parents applied soap suds, cooking oil and tried about everything with no success.. They got a doctor and he worked with ^hhis delicate instruments but he finally said:

"It's no use, you just have break the vase". The frightened little boy looked up and cried, "Would it help if I turned loose the penny I'm holding".

Sometimes, it is our holding onto old ways of possessiveness and self-centeredness that keeps us from having paraclete power.

The paraclete,, the spirit, the comforter, the counselor, the helper . . will become more than a word to you if you follow dasily discipline to renew your commitment to Christ. Practicing the presence of God ought to become primary goal. Prayer time needs to become more important than the coffee break, Bbiel study time needs to become more important than television time. You can use all kinds of reminders to focus on your Christian commitment.

The story is told about a man who walked into the office of an old friend. While visiting he noticed a rock on the desk which said 'one' on it. Curious, the man asked his friend about it. The friend explained that it was his first stone. "Remember the woman caught in adultery who was brought to Jesus? The law required that she be stoned to death. The crowd asked Jesus what to do with her. Jesus srote in the dirt, then looked up an answered, 'let the person among you who is without sin throw the first stone'. Then Jesus for-

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A number of years ago, a friend of mine gave me a smooth stone. I asked her what it was for and she said that it was a pacifier. Instead of twiddling my thumbs I was supposed to massage the stone .. thus preventing ulcers and other assorted maladies.

Well I had a hard time using the pacifier. Then one day, when I was deeply involved with a particular issue facing the community, I had, I thought, reason to condemn another person.

Then I thought of the story about the woman taken in adultery. The law required that she be stoned to death. The crowd asked Jesus what to do with her. You remember that Jesus wrote something in the dirt and looked up and said: "Let the person among you who is without sin cast the first stone" Then Jesus forgives the woman and the crowd drifted away.

So right then and there my pacifying stone became my first stone. It stirred up my commitment when I have ready to condemn.. And any time I feel the urge to condemn, or when anger threatens to rush out, I would clench my first stone until I felt a

power rising within me. Then my temptation was finished. 7

We all need first stone to remind us that Christ's way of forgiveness and compassion is the only way out of many selfish situations we get into. It doesn't take a great deal of talent or theological insight to forgive, only a loving and compassionate way that comes from practice and attitude.

Paraclete power can rise again in you and in me today and every day, but we must work at it. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me". That is a daily task.

Maybe that's what you can do. Get a stone and put on your desk, or in your kitchen, Get a stone and put it in your pocket. Make it your first stone. Make it a stone which is a reminder and a sign of surrender, for in surrender you will be filled with the power of the paraclete, and you will bring restoration, forgiveness, and love to this sick world.