John 14:15-21

PRAYER: ***May God be exalted by the hearing of his word, and may the Holy Spirit grant me the right words to say that God's message may be understood.***

Wrapped in the Holy Comforter

Imagine the evening of the last supper. Jesus has just had dinner with his disciples. During dinner he'd had to face the fact that Judas, a man he'd taught and eaten with and worked with for 3 years was already headed out to betray Him to the authorities. He is so hurt and sad, and yet he wants to prepare his disciples for what's to come. They are still totally clueless about Judas' betrayal and about Jesus' real mission. They argue among themselves about who is greater, when he's been trying to teach them about servant leadership. They are still insecure and fearful – even Peter, who walked on water, will deny knowing him in just a few hours. He tries to clarify for them his relationship to God the Father. He has just told them that "I am in the Father and the Father is in me. It is the father living in me who is doing his work." The disciples don't quite grasp this. Jesus wants to forestall the panic and confusion his disciples; his sheep will feel at his death.

He addresses their emotions saying: if you love me, you will keep my commands. Today that phrase triggers remembrances of all kinds of human manipulative behavior. Jesus doesn't play those games. In his view there are only 2 kinds of people: those who love him, and those who don't. Jesus' instructions to his disciples are: Don't go back to your old ways of thinking, but remember all I've taught you. Follow the ground rules I set for you these last 3 years. Don't indulge in petty rivalries with each other; don't let Satan tempt you into pursuing women or money or political power. If you love me, you'll seek to honor my name by doing what I asked of you. AND because **I** love you, I will ask the Father to send "the spirit of truth" to help you and be with you forever. Left unsaid is "because I know how easy it will be to get off track once I can't be physically here with you anymore". Jesus has put a lot of time and effort into training his apostles and he wants them to succeed in the tasks he has set for them. He is invested in their success. They are critical to the master plan. His human side also knows how bereft they will feel at his death. Remember it wasn't long ago that Jesus wept when he learned Lazarus was dead, even though he was about to bring him back to life. He understands grief.

He says, "I will not leave you as orphans". In the Jewish world of that time, and in many societies since, the fate of an orphan was desperate - There were no gov't orphanages. An orphan was supposed to be taken in by relatives, but if all their relatives were gone, they were virtual beggars, ousted from their homes with no one to protect them from slave traders or robbers, no one to provide food and shelter and dependent on charity of their neighbors or tribe. Just imagine how helpless the disciples would feel at the loss of Jesus, who had been their guiding light, their absolute leader and commander, for 3 full years. He'd decided where they would go, when they would stop to rest, or eat, and what they would do. He had an answer for every question, a solution to every problem. How well can the sheep fare without the shepherd? What about all their grand hopes for a free and prosperous Israel with this Messiah in charge?

In truth, I believe some of the grief and despair the apostles felt after the crucifixion was from the loss of their dreams as much as from the loss of their friend and leader. It would have been SO easy for them to fall into depression. Jesus, however, had the script for Act II already written. He knew God had no intention of letting the 3 years of training these men had go to waste. Jesus would not abandon them with his death. On the contrary, he informs them *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever.* God will send His Holy Spirit to dwell in them. This is a tremendous game changer! This will transform these ordinary men into fearless evangelists on par with Jacob, David, Daniel and the prophets. Jesus tells them of the Holy Spirit, saying, "*The world cannot receive him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he abides with you and he will be in you."* Think about this. The world cannot receive him – because the rationalists would scoff at the concept as fantasy and the pagans would believe it to be a possession by demons. The world is blind to him because the world attributes most of God's miracles to coincidence or to some scientific theory. Psychologists tell us the voice of the Holy Spirit is more likely "intuition" or in some cases, schizophrenia. Jesus reminds the apostles that they already know the Holy Spirit because they have seen Him at work during the whole of Jesus' ministry. The Holy Spirit was with them as they fed the 5000, as they drove out demons, and as they healed the sick. Just as they had seen the Father in Jesus, so too they had seen the Holy Spirit through Jesus.

I think maybe Jesus needs to remind <u>us</u> as well how often we've seen the Holy Spirit at work, or benefited from his presence. We have seen the Holy Spirit work through people who have shown us undeserved favor, like when the clerk at Shaws rang up my order using the employee discount code. We've seen him in miraculous recoveries from injuries that doctors said were fatal, and in unexpected blessings during times when we felt hurt or abandoned.

The Holy Spirit is one person of the trinity. He is a person, not an effect. He is our life coach! The Holy Spirit nudges us toward God. He shows us our sins. He presents us with the truth of the word of God, teaching us what we could not understand in our human reasoning. He has many roles and we can never fully understand him. <u>The scripture likens Him to the wind: you don't see it but you witness its effects, you feel its presence.</u> The Holy Spirit sanctifies believers and helps them bear fruit as Christians while avoiding temptation and sin. When we rely on the Holy Spirit, we are not fighting our battles alone.

- Jesus identifies the role of the Holy Spirit as being an advocate to help the disciples as they carry out their mission. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles confirmation of Jesus' divine standing. In John 15:26 Jesus tells his disciples that the" Spirit of Truth will come to you from the Father and testify all about me." The Holy Spirit helped the disciples remember and interpret all Jesus' teachings, something that would be unlikely in the natural. In John 16:13 Jesus presents the Holy Spirit as a guide to truth and a messenger from God. Jesus tells his apostles, "He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me".

- Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:9-14, that the words he utters were "taught by the spirit", who is the only one privy to the thoughts of God. We can pray for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts that we may better understand God's word and God's will. It was the Holy Spirit that

revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Messiah (*In* Matthew 16:16). Jesus comments upon this revelation as being divinely inspired. Haven't you experienced sudden revelations from the Holy Spirit? That little voice inside you that speaks just when you need it, that warns you before you trust the wrong person, that puts a mission idea into your head that won't shake loose, or that tells you suddenly to call someone you haven't thought about in weeks. **The Holy Spirit is our spark of divinity, Christ in us.**

- EVERY believer can call on the Holy Spirit. For example, in the winter of 2015 3 teenagers in Missouri were messing around on a frozen lake when the ice suddenly gave way. Two boys escaped to shore, but their friend John sank to the bottom. A rescue crew arrived within 15 minutes and pulled John to the surface and rushed him to the hospital while doing CPR. After 27 more minutes of CPR at the hospital, his mother arrived and was admitted into the ER, as the doctor was ready to record time of death. She walked up to her son, grabbed his feet and started praying that God would send his Holy Spirit to raise him up and heal him. Within moments the machines beeped indicating a pulse. The staff, amazed, jumped into action and 16 days later the boy walked out completely recovered. **That's the power of the Holy Spirit.**

  It was the Holy Spirit who gave Paul and the other apostles the strength to endure persecution. It was the Holy Spirit who gave Peter and John the power to heal the man begging at the temple so he could walk again. It was the Holy Spirit who showed John the future judgment of the world in Revelation. Do not stifle His voice or refuse his aide! He is way smarter than we are!

- **The church is blessed with immense power through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of its members.** If we focus on Christ rather than on worldly things, and love him enough to obey his commands, the Holy Spirit will show us what God wants us to do and He will anoint us with the wisdom and power to achieve it. He is our advocate who pleads for us when Satan tries to make us feel fearful, shamed, or guilty.

- I know that when trouble hits, it's very comforting to curl up in your favorite chair with a beer or a pint of Haagen Daas, wrapping yourself in self-pity or self-righteous justification. Indulge for a couple minutes, but realize it won't move you forward. The Holy Spirit helps us master our emotions and see things from God's point of view. He never lies. He is guides us through the trials and troubles that are part of the Christian life. Guard your heart and your thoughts from negative emotions by curling up with God's word. Pray out loud. Recite God's promises for those who love him. By doing this you can Wrap yourself firmly in the Holy Spirit who is God's comforter, being warmed by his love and renewed by his strength. Listen for his voice telling you how much God loves you and know that Jesus has not left you helpless. Not now, not ever!

Lord, help us to remain forever grateful for your gift of the Holy Spirit, who imparts eternal life to those who are obedient to your word. Amen.