

SERMON

John 14:15-17

Another Counsellor

Nunawading and Waverley, 5-6-22

Dear friends in Christ,

A friend and colleague of mine is a rock climber. It sounds dangerous but he loves it and has been properly trained. We could use this as an analogy for what our Lord Jesus spoke about when he mentioned **another counsellor**, someone like him. Our aim is to climb to the top and not fall. On the way up, he asks us to be kind to fellow rock climbers. He tells us to tie ourselves to them and hold them should they slip. There are others who call themselves rock climbers but do not want to start the climb and still others who think the cliff and blue sky above do not exist. We want to encourage them to join us and reach for the heavens. One day, our instructor leaves. Where will we get advice? How can we find the best foot holds and the best route up? What if we slip and hurt ourselves?

This was the situation of the disciples and it is ours as well. The Lord Jesus is not here for us to see and copy what he is doing, nor do we hear his clear voice of instruction in our ears. We face the cliff of the Lord's mission of taking forgiveness and redemption to others. The culture does not support Christianity and we are a minority. Who is here to guide us? Christ says that **if we love him, we will do what he commands**. His command is to love. That is another cliff. Life is more demanding. There are many opportunities to pursue yet others need us. How do we balance our commitment to others when we have so little time for ourselves? Loving others sounds great but it is mighty hard to do. We should be tied to others, as rock climbers do, but we are often not.

Our Lord Jesus has all these issues in hand. He promised his anxious disciples another **helper, advocate, counsellor and comforter**. Paraclete has all these meanings. The Lord Jesus cannot be seen anymore but he has promised himself to us in the person of the Holy Spirit, **another counsellor**. Instead of being at the base of the cliff instructing us, he climbs with us by being within us. From our baptism on, his abiding presence is now with us. He is very straight forward about this, using the simplest of words: **he lives with you and will be in you**. How wonderful it is for us to believe that his Spirit is inside us and we have him forever.

Our relationship with the Counsellor could not be closer. No one else is inside us but he is. This means that he is right at hand, with us in every tricky situation. First, he teaches us the truth so that we know Christ, have the right foundation for our faith and can recognise falsehood. Every civilisation has its gods and when our country moves away from Christ, people will put that yearning to believe in other things, such as all the causes we hear so much about, such as climate action, equality, aboriginal empowerment and so on. All these are good in themselves but for some, they constitute the new religion. Therefore, Jesus said that **the world cannot recognise the Spirit's presence**, much less receive the Holy Spirit's abiding presence. Let us thank him, that while we can support many causes, we know that they cannot give us the ultimate truth. You will hear the Spirit teaching you as you participate in worship and sense the Lord is speaking and has a message for you. It is why you underline verses of Scripture or get excited when a prayer is answered. The Spirit is talking and leading you deeper into the truth.

God loves us so dearly we can barely imagine how strong that love is, how life-giving it is, how it burns deep within us with warmth, security and peace. Since the Spirit plants this love in us, he helps us now to love those around us. We have irritations, grumpiness, complaints, annoyances and anger, impatience, intolerance, misunderstandings, bad thoughts about others, meanness, selfishness, jealousies and the need to compete. Oh, my goodness, all these things that take love away from us! Yet, while love can be so far from us at times, it is right here, in our hearts; and the Holy Spirit refreshes it every morning. There is only one thing we need do to unblock it and that is to confess how we feel and the wrong attitude we may have. If we take up that cross and admit that what is happening within us is not pretty and we want to change, all that love of God within the Holy Spirit will come gushing forth from within us.

Finally, the Holy Spirit guides us in mission. **He lives within us; he has taken up his home** within each of us like the old idea of God being in a temple, his house. No, we are his house and he sits with us, walks with us, lies down with us. He is at home here. Will he then not help us when we think of ways to reach the young and hold them, or reach the visitors and reach the community? We are not alone in this. It looks like a high cliff with few footholds but we climb with the Spirit showing us the next step. And finally, the Spirit will get us to the top.