

Remember John 14:16, 26? In Jesus' final moments had with the disciples he promised to literally send them a Parakletos. Literally, he was going to send the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever. the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* That's what we celebrate at Pentecost - the coming of the Holy Spirit. A "para-what?" Para-Cleet - Like shoes to run fast on the soccer field? Para-keet - like a bird. One image of the HS is a dove, maybe there is a link there. The Greek word Jesus used to describe the Spirit - parakletos is difficult to translate into English. Bible translations use a variety of words, because one word is not adequate to describe it. In Greek it is "*a strong person called in alongside to help in time of trouble*". In the Gospel of John, however, the Paraclete is sent, rather than called in. Kind of like Methodist pastors are sent, not called in like other denominations.

1. "**Paraclete**" (NewAmB). direct translation from Greek - need to know the Greek background.
1. "**Counsellor**" (RSV, NIV), or "**Advocate**" (JB, NRSV, NEB, Weymouth): A Paraclete was a person called in to a legal matter to give witness in a court of law in someone's favor, or as an advocate to plead the case of an accused person. The Latin writers in the early church often described the Paraclete as the Advocate - one coming to counsel, help, listen and give advice. The Holy Spirit as our **Advocate** pleads our case to God.
2. "**Helper**" (Moffat, TEB, NASB), "Someone to stand by you" (Philips), "The Message" Friend. A Paraclete is someone called in to **help in time of trouble or need**. The Holy Spirit is the Person of God we can call upon to cope with any situation in our lives.
3. "**Comforter**" (Wycliffe, KJV) The word "comforter" is misleading today. For us, a **comforter** is a person one who cheers up the sad & stops their tears which was not the primary role of the Holy Spirit described in John's Gospel. But this is misleading - 17C English - the word **comforter** meant to make brave, to strengthen. What I found interesting is that Paraclete was used as a military term, in times of battle. In the Middle Ages, soldiers actually got assigned a buddy. You went into battle together, He couldn't keep you from having to fight, from having to face the battle, but he was there with you. You literally fought with your buddy back-to-back, so nothing could sneak up on you while he was there, fighting with you. He had your back, and you had his. This soldier was called your paraclete. The one who has your back when the going gets rough to help you be strong and brave. A Paraclete could also be someone called in when a **company of soldiers** was depressed and dispirited. The Paraclete would boost morale and give them a new heart and mind through words of encouragement. In that sense, the HS is our Comforter, to provide us with new spirit and strength.

So, the Paraclete as Jesus used in John 14 is our companion, literally the one called alongside us.

Let's move to the scriptures for today - Two very different pictures of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the early followers. In John 20, there is an intimate gathering where Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples in the Upper Room - the same day as the resurrection. In the Book of Acts, the gathering is much more public - it is at the time of the Jewish celebration of Pentecost 50 days after Passover or for Christians, after Easter - and the HS comes with very powerful images. *Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and rested on them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

These different ways of receiving the Spirit are not so different when you look at word origin. The Hebrew and Greek words for "Spirit" are *ruach* and *pneuma*, both can be translated as breath, wind, or air. It takes us back to creation: Jesus breathing upon his disciples in the Gospel of John is almost copying word-for-word from Gen. 2:7 *God formed man from the dust of the ground, and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**; and the man became a living being.* Gn 1:1 *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while **a wind from God** swept over the face of the waters.*

In the Hebrew Bible, "wind" and "fire" are both associated with the presence of God. The "tongues as of fire" reflect Hebrew scripture in which fire indicates the presence of God - the burning bush and the pillar of fire in Exodus.

So we have these many images of the Holy Spirit - as the Paraclete with its many understandings. The Holy Spirit as breath of life; as wind; as fire. How do you experience the Holy Spirit in your life? One of the mysteries and miracles that happened on that day of Pentecost is that everyone understood the Word of God, the Spirit of God in their own language. For me, this brings a profound reassurance that God speaks my language, and God speaks your language, too. Whoever we are, wherever we are from, whatever we are like, the Holy Spirit knows how to address us in ways that we can specially understand. What are the languages in which the rush of the Spirit breathes its way into your life?

For some, the Spirit speaks in words, in a favorite verse or image from Scripture: *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"; "Nothing can separate us from the love of God..." "Peace I give you."* Or perhaps poetry or journaling. For others, the Spirit speaks in music: the swell of an organ, the acoustic guitar, the familiar melody of a hymn that has been sung and loved since childhood. For some, the Spirit speaks in laughter: in joy which catches us by surprise, bursting in upon us, reminding us of the incredible abundance of living. For others, the Spirit speaks in tears: in the cry of a child, or the cry of our own yearning, that calls us to deeper sensitivity and compassion. For many of us, the Spirit speaks in nature: in sunrise and sunset, the cycling of the seasons, the greening of new life, the gold of harvest, the rush of wind and the dance of fire. For others, the Spirit speaks most profoundly in silence...and out of silence, in a

still, small voice. What are the voices in which the Holy Spirit speaks to you, calls out to you, sweeps you up into the presence of God?

We need a paraclete who has our back when we undergo our own tests, face our own battles.

So whether Jesus is your **para-sol**, that opens when you need some shade when things get hot, or...

your **Paratrooper** - the one who goes ahead to open the door for you, or...

your **Parachute** - the Spirit who helps you land safely when life is a leap of faith, or...

your **parable** - an earthly story with heavenly meaning, or...

your **paradigm** - following the Spirit into living God's way is a shift in the pattern of living only for yourself.

your **paramedic** - who you call when you are in trouble...

As a Paraclete, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, can be all these things for us. And eventually, if we trust and have faith in God, Jesus will take us on to Paradise - the place of living God's way.

Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, you can be assured by the miracle of Pentecost that God knows how to speak a language specifically designed for you to understand. God is our Paraclete, God has our back. Whether the Holy Spirit comes to you as breath or wind or fire, or as Advocate, Counsellor, Teacher, Helper, Holy Comforter, Friend - Listen for the language God has to speak to you today.

We're wearing red today because red is the liturgical color of the Holy Spirit. Red is the color of fire and symbolizes the presence of God. Just as Moses saw the burning bush as a symbol of God's presence, so we wear red today as a symbol of God's presence with us, but also as a reminder of the coming of the Spirit on that Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ.