

+ John 14:23-29 + Discover Comfort in the Heaven-Sent Helper! +
+ Sixth Sunday of Easter + 9 May 2010 +

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We live in a world of fear, don't we? Fear of the unknown. Fear of war and violence. Fear of economic collapse and disasters natural or manmade. Fear of becoming helpless or hopeless, jobless or homeless. Fear of disease and doctors and hospitals. Fear of government and culture and change, of liberals and conservatives and radicals. Fear of the past. Fear for the future or our children's future. Fear of guilt and consequences and punishment. Fear of reality, of hearing what we don't want to hear. Fear of ourselves. Fear of others. Fear of what they could do to us and we to them. Fear of death. Fear at home, at school, at work, even at church. Everywhere you look, you see fear. It doesn't matter how tough the exterior. There's still some fear behind those eyes. Fear is a demon that plagues us all. The shrill voices of fear threaten to drown out everything else.

...But then another voice—a sweet voice untouched by fear pierces through all the noise to reach our fear-filled ears and hearts. That voice brings peace. That voice has brought peace to countless generations of fear-filled people. That voice reaches out across the centuries to us today. It is the voice of the Savior. “Why are you so afraid? Why are you worried? Why are you filled with doubt? Find peace in me. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Instead **DISCOVER COMFORT IN MY HEAVEN-SENT HELPER.**”

Long before we needed to hear that voice of comfort, Jesus' disciples needed his comfort for their troubled hearts. It was a Thursday evening. They had just finished celebrating the Jewish festival of Passover, but Jesus had shared some troubling news. That very night one of their own would betray him to his enemies. Jesus would be condemned and put to death, while all his disciples would abandon him to save their own skins. Even Peter would publicly deny Jesus.

All this bad news filled the disciples with fear. It's not surprising. The prospect of losing their Teacher after three years of following him shook them to the core. What would they do? How could something so awful happen to him? Their fear threatened to overwhelm them.

So Jesus did what we so often see him do elsewhere in the Gospels. He calmed their troubled hearts. He removed their fear. He reminded them of what they had seen and heard over the past three years. **“All this I have spoken while still with you.”** Then Jesus provided the help the disciples needed to understand and believe the profound truths he was teaching them that night, truths they needed to hear before his suffering began.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Help was on the way. Hours later Jesus was betrayed and his suffering began. By Friday evening, he was dead on a cross. He was hurriedly buried, but three days later on Easter Sunday, his tomb stood empty. That Easter evening, Jesus himself reminded his disciples, **“This is what I told you while I was still with you...”** Jesus fulfilled his promises as he had told the disciples. He removed their fear, but after forty days of appearing to his disciples and teaching them, Jesus took them to a hill outside Jerusalem, raised his hands in blessing, and ascended into heaven.

Help was still on the way! Ten days later on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, Jesus made good on his promise. His heavenly Father sent the Holy Spirit to provide the help Jesus' disciples so desperately needed. The Holy Spirit, the Helper, would **“teach [them] all things”**. The Holy Spirit would help them to understand how Jesus fulfilled all the promises of the Old Testament of a Savior from sin. He would help them to fully grasp what it was that Jesus accomplished through his perfect life, his innocent suffering and death and his glorious resurrection—forgiveness for their sins and the reality of eternal life with him in heaven.

The Holy Spirit would **“remind [them] of everything [Jesus had] said to [them]”**, all the promises, all the teaching that Jesus had ever shared with them. The Holy Spirit would then fill their hearts with a desire to share that good news of Christ Jesus and enable them to carry out that task right away. Help came to those disciples and because of that God-given help, we're here today. You see, the Holy Spirit worked through the good news of Christ Jesus they proclaimed to create faith in Jesus in the hearts of people all over the world even up to us here today and beyond.

How badly we need the comfort of the One who has overcome fear! When trouble or difficulty or hardship comes into your life, on your own, you're left to search for your own help and that help won't last. Self-help books and pithy advice can only go so far, before you're left alone and helpless. Without Jesus' help, you slide further into fear and despair.

In his gracious and merciful love, however, Jesus pulls you out of that despair. He comes to you through his Word, through the good news of sins forgiven and eternal life won for you on a cross and in an empty tomb. He also has help for you, a “Helper” actually, just as he did for the disciples.

What kind of “Helper” is this? In the original, that word literally means “the One who is always going to be by your side”. It has the idea of one who is an advocate or mediator, a counselor, an encourager, a comforter. In fact, one language in Central Africa translates the word as “the one who falls down beside you”, that if he found you hurt on the side of a road, he wouldn’t hesitate to kneel down in the mud and dirt to help and care for you.

That is the Helper the Lord sends to you from heaven to take away your fear. That Helper doesn’t come through a dream or a thunderstorm or indigestion. Jesus sends that Helper to you through his holy Word, the same Good News he proclaimed so long ago. Through that Word, the Holy Spirit helps you to remember what Jesus taught there and what he did there. There in the Word, the Holy Spirit helps you to remember how countless are the promises of God and how just as countless are his fulfillments. Jesus fulfilled every one and continues to fulfill them even today—forgiveness for the guilt of all your sin, confidence in the reality of eternal life in heaven, purpose for your life as a beloved child of God, certainty that the almighty and gracious God is in control of all things no matter what. Then, of course, there’s Christ’s everlasting, ever-present peace for your troubled heart. Jesus promises, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”***

Those clear words seem so simple, but think about when Jesus was speaking them to his disciples. The next day would be the most violent in Jesus’ earthly life and the most heart-wrenching for his disciples. Jesus would suffer excruciating pain being nailed to a cross besides all the ridicule and flogging and injustice and rejection both from the leaders, who should’ve known better, and from his heavenly Father. The disciples would go into fearful hiding behind locked doors, but still Jesus promised them his peace.

You see, Jesus’ peace is unlike any other peace in the world. It doesn’t depend on treaties or agreements or fragile relations between warring countries or tense tempers. His peace isn’t the kind that’s given if you give something back in return. No, Jesus gives his peace away freely, willingly, almost recklessly. With that peace, Jesus calmed their fear-filled hearts.

Christ’s gift of peace is yours today too. Why? Look around you and see all the fear. Look into your heart and see the fear hidden there. We live in a world of fear that threatens to overwhelm every one of us. At the same time, the peace the world promises only leaves behind empty, fear-filled souls.

Oh, how sweet is that voice of the Savior, that voice untouched by fear, that voice that has brought comfort to prophets and apostles, to countless believers of every generation! It is that voice that pierces through all the noise of fear and calms your fear-filled heart, “Why are you so afraid? ***Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I don’t give as the world gives.*** Look at the peace I your Brother, your Comforter give to you, my Beloved. Look back into my manger bed and see how peace came to earth that first Christmas night to live for you. Look at my cross and see how I bring peace for your guilt-ridden soul. Look at my empty tomb and see how I bring peace to your fears about death and your worries about life. Look at how I now rule all things for your good, so you can have peace even in a world filled with fear. ***Do not let your hearts be troubled.*** My Holy Spirit, your Helper sent from heaven, shares my peace through my Word. Listen to that Word. Find comfort there in my Gospel promises. ***Do not be afraid.*** My peace is real and it’s yours. Find comfort in me and my heaven-sent Helper.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you have no need to fear. Your Savior Jesus has reduced fear to a shadow that disappears with the light of dawn. Look at what Jesus has done for you. Look at what he has promised you. Look at how he helps you by sending his Holy Spirit to you through his Word. So then lift your eyes heavenward and know that your living Savior is coming again soon. He will sweep away every last shadow of fear and bring you to be with him forever in heaven. There is no need to fear. Amen.