



The Gospel of John

Week 7: Paraclete

Brian Mattson - 07/13/2025

Do you know the term *orienteering*? I do. Not because my vocabulary is prodigious and quite manifold, although it is, but because I am an Eagle Scout. And one of the merit badges we got during scout camp one summer at Camp Arrowhead was orienteering. It was a competition between all the packs there that summer to find your way. Over a few days, we got lessons about the compass and maps and landmarks. Those things were our only guide. We were handed a set of coordinates and then a series of directions—60 paces at 22° or 35 paces at 270°—and once we followed the steps and used our map, we should arrive at the end goal or “hidden treasure.” Whoever finished the course quickest was the winner. And one year, my troop actually did it, thanks to the steady-footed Willie Albrecht.

Scout camp was one thing. It was basically impossible to get lost there. You could see the 40-foot climbing tower from quite a distance, and the smells from the mess hall always gave you a sense of familiarity and comfort. But years later, I traveled to Philmont Scout Ranch. A sprawling hiking camp nestled in the southern Rocky Mountains of New Mexico.

This was a giant leap from trying to find our way in the familiar settings of scout Camp. At Camp Arrowhead, we had our parents, and they knew the surroundings and could answer questions about the map. At Philmont, there were 12,000-foot mountains, rushing mountain streams, bears, bison, and

Boy Scouts, oh my. When we stepped off the train in New Mexico after a 12-hour ride from Kansas City, everything was new to everyone.

At Base Camp, our small group was assigned a ranger to guide and assist us for the first two days of the 12-day trek. He showed us how to use the map and refreshed our brains about the compass. He talked about safety in the wilderness and in the mountains. There were bears here, so our food and trash needed to be kept in bear bags, strung up in trees. He discussed medical treatments for sprains and elevation sickness. And for two days, we followed his every lead. And then he left. One morning he got up and hiked the opposite direction we were headed. He left us with as much knowledge he could impart and then trusted us to find our way.

That first day without our guide was a little stressful. I'm sure it was stressful for the dads with us because they had to relinquish control. We moved much more cautiously at the forks in the trail and we took our time fording shallow streams. We finally arrived at our destination that third day. It only took us a couple hours longer than anticipated because of our extreme caution, but we did it. We trusted the words and wisdom our guide gave us, and we put that knowledge to work. And each day after that it was easier and easier to get where we were going.

I'm happy to say we only lost two trekkers that year. It was a bad year for bears. I kid. Nick D'lack had some asthma issues at that altitude, so he and his dad had to go back to Base Camp.

I learned the value of a guide on that trip. It's a big, scary world out there. Our guide helped calm our fears when we didn't know what to do or what would come next. Jesus was just that person for the disciples. They'd been traveling with him for years at this point in the story. From the banks of the Sea of Galilee to the streets of Jerusalem, he taught them and cared for them. He showed them what life could look like in the Kingdom of God. He was their leader when times got tough or when questions arose. And just last

week, we talked about how Jesus modeled servant leadership by his humility and selfless act of washing feet.

He pleads with them, commands them to love one another. **“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Jesus has been hinting that he’s leaving soon. And Peter wonders where. He’s worried, I’m sure, that his guide, his leader, his lord won’t be around. That’s a scary thing. I’m sure Peter said what all the disciples were wondering and feeling.

Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.”

- John 13:36

Jesus senses their anxious hearts. He knows what lies ahead, and Peter’s question and dismay—I’m sure shared by the other disciples—leads us to a few chapters in John known as the Final Discourse. In the teaching and conversation, Jesus explains the significance of his death and departure. John 14–16 mirrors common literary styles of the time, along with Old Testament writings. Dr. Jennifer Garcia Bashaw says this about the section of scripture:

“...the best way to read Jesus’s Farewell Discourse is as a retirement speech in which Jesus reveals truths about his pending exit to the disciples, reassures them in the face of upcoming uncertainty, and gives them high-quality advice about carrying on after his death, resurrection, and ascension.”

- Dr. Jennifer Garcia Bashaw

It’s kind of like a speech, yes, but it’s also a very tender scene between dear friends. Friends who love each other and know the end of their journey together is near. Jesus feels these things too and does his best to provide comfort.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

- John 14:1-4

These words have been spoken at countless funerals. Words that offer hope in the face of doubt, uncertainty, and fear. Immediately, Thomas pipes up, again saying what I’m sure all the others were thinking. “Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’”

Jesus pulls out another patented “I am” statement. He reminds Thomas, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Then, yet another disciple speaks up. Phillip this time says, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

It’s easy to poke a little fun at the disciples here. Why can’t they get it? It seems pretty clear what Jesus is telling them, but that’s easy to say on this side of the story. They are often the fall guys in the gospels, used to prove a point or as a reason to further explain things when they can’t seem to grasp what Jesus is teaching. I don’t think that’s what is happening here. I think they are just scared and worried, and their feelings are raw. *What are you saying, Jesus? We don’t want you to leave? Who will lead us? How will we know what to do?* Remember, this inner circle has seen the power and authority of Jesus, live and in person. Would you want to face the Pharisees or Roman authorities without him?

Jesus reminds Phillip and the rest that they’ve already seen the Father, because the Father dwells in Jesus, helping him say the words and do the works. And if the disciples continue to believe in Jesus and his way of life,

they will continue to do the work that Jesus modeled. And then he promises that help is on the way.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. [Remember: we just heard Jesus give the disciples a new commandment to love one another.] And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.”

- John 14:15-19

Again, it's important to remember the kind of living Jesus is talking about here. This is Eternal Life, a Godly life. Something is coming soon to help continue Jesus's work of making the disciples, the world, us today, new creations. But put yourself in the disciples' sandals for a moment. Jesus is flat out telling them that he's leaving, but another will be sent to help them on the journey. He continues on with more details about this Advocate, or in Greek, the *Paraclete*.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, 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.”

- John 14:25-26

The word *Paraclete* is unique to John's gospel. It's not been an easy word for translators to nail down. In various versions of John, we read Advocate, Helper, Comforter, Counselor. One translation simply turns the word into the phrase *someone else to stand by you*. Regardless, the author equates this

Paraclete with the Spirit of truth. The coming of the Holy Spirit to stand by us once Jesus leaves the scene.

The Holy Spirit is one of those squishy subjects. Vague and indefinable. Jesus showed us what to do and how to live, but to put that into practice is something we kind of have to figure out on our own, isn't it? There are five references to the *Paraclete* in this Farewell Discourse, each one giving a different idea about what the Holy Spirit will do. But Jesus is answering a key theological question for the disciples and us now: If Jesus as the incarnate Word brings a distinctive revelation of God to the community, what happens when the incarnation ends? The Spirit of truth, the *Paraclete*, this advocate to stand with us, is a link between the ministry of Jesus and the future life of the Church after his death. By sending the Holy Spirit, Jesus reassures the disciples that they aren't orphans. *We aren't orphans. This is God reaching through the pages to us today. My peace I leave you; I give to you. I'm going soon, but don't let your hearts be troubled. You know the way to me. Do the things I showed you. Love the way I loved you. And there's another guide coming soon.*

The author of John has been talking a lot about spirit. Nicodemus had to be born again of water and Spirit. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that true worship of God is in Spirit and truth. "God is spirit," he says. John says he saw the Spirit descend and stay with Jesus. Another word for spirit in the Bible is breath. The Holy Spirit can be as close as our breath.

[VIDEO CLIP](#)

This conversation in the Upper Room after dinner, after the feet have been washed, is an emotional scene of friends getting ready to say their goodbyes. Scared friends. They were fearful and anxious, and in times of stress and confusion, sometimes it's hard to breathe. Have you read the news lately? It's hard to catch our breath right now. I know that. I feel it. But we can't stop breathing.

There have been times in my life when this pastor needed the Spirit to guide me back into a strong relationship with God. Times when the Paraclete has comforted me in my doubt and sorrow, stood alongside me in my grief. I recall days when the Advocate reminded me of God's love and faithfulness when I couldn't see the road ahead.

Jesus, in the world today, in our lives, how do we get where you are? We can't see the lights of your Father's house, can't smell its kitchens. We have no easy point of reference and so often don't know where we're going. But. When we remember that our guide is already with us, as close as our breath, we can find the way forward. Just. Breathe. God is already here, with you, in you. The voice of the Holy Spirit guides us toward the Kingdom, both on earth and in heaven, we just have to listen.