### “The Advocate” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 22, 2022

**Romans 8:14–17**

14For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

**John 14:23–28**

23Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

25 “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26But 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. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. 28You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.”

The words of the prophets have always intrigued me, but it’s the words of Jesus that seem to speak directly to me. Today I want to start with the reading from John, talk about the Advocate, the Spirit, weave in the Romans passage, and then go back to John to finish. That way, I can begin and end with the words of Jesus.

Jesus is preparing the apostles for his imminent departure from Earth. He has been with them daily for three or four years and knows their fears and concerns. He knows they don’t understand everything and will need words of hope and joy to help them get through the coming days.

He starts out by saying he and his Father will make their home with the believer. His word is not his own, but is from the Father (14:24), thus making it clear that his teaching comes from God, and is authorized by God. Then he says that the Father will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, in his name, to teach them “everything” and to remind them of what he taught (14:26).

Elsewhere he explains that it is good for them that he should leave them, because only then can he send them the Spirit (16:7). Here he says something similar, “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father” (14:28), but he gives a different reason; it’s “because the Father is greater than I.” The connection is not really clear. Maybe it just means the disciples should be happy that Jesus is going to the Father, the Great and unparalleled power in the universe. Perhaps it means that they should celebrate the anticipated acceptance of Jesus by the Father. In any case, they should rejoice that Jesus will be completing his mission and returning home to his Father.

There are some uncertainties in that saying about the Father being greater. And so I want to lay out some certainties to offset this uncertainty. I feel confident that the *quality* of Jesus’ revelation of the Father is perfect. There could not be a better quality of revelation of the Father’s nature. “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), Jesus says. And Colossians says “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19). This is what is crucial, I think, the idea of the perfection of Jesus’ embodiment of the Father’s will and the Father’s way. One of the main purposes of Jesus’ mission was to reveal the loving nature of the Father and get people to understand that we *all* come from the same Father, and thus, logically, should live in a brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity.

Some important practical questions remain for us: is Jesus the Savior? Did he represent the fullness of God in a human life? Did Jesus live with God before the foundation of the world (17:24)? I give a yes answer to all these questions.

Something also to affirm as true is that Jesus and the Father sent the Advocate, the Spirit, to guide us into all Truth. The Spirit can be a life-long guide for us, if we learn to follow its leading. . . or *her* leading, if we accept the pronoun that *some* early Christians used for the Spirit, whom they sometimes called *Sophia*, that is, Wisdom. In Greek, *Sophia* is feminine, but “Spirit,” or *Pneuma*, is neuter. So the gender is probably not as important as getting better at sensing the guidance of the Holy Spirit by giving ourselves time to reflect on our spiritual nature, waiting for and listening to that inner voice. With practice we begin to filter out the “noise” of daily concerns and to discern the Eternal Truth. Discerning the Spirit takes practice.

Now let’s turn to Paul. He is someone who *knows* he is part of God’s family. He talks about being a child of God, saying “all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:14). Paul sees the Spirit as proof of our adoption as sons and daughters of God, and so we cry out “papa,” or “Abba! Father!” (8:15). In addition to the Spirit poured out upon all receptive people on Pentecost, we all have our own individual, inward spirit. Paul says that *the* Spirit bears “witness with *our* spirit that we are children of God” (8:16). Truth affirms Truth. Spirit echoes spirit. As children, we are heirs, joint-heirs with Christ the Son of God, if we are willing to suffer with him. For Paul, believers’ lives will emulate the Savior’s life, to some degree. We will have to suffer with him in the conditions of this world, and then be glorified with him in the next (8:17). Our mission here is to share the love that radiates from the Father, and to see everyone as part of the Father’s family.

What does the Spirit do for us? Jesus says it will “teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). He knows that the apostles will soon be without him, and he wants to assure them of the spiritual help they will receive. He says “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (14:27). The world always wants you to pay for everything. Jesus does not give expecting any payment back. It is a gift of love, meant to help us grow and prosper spiritually.

“Don’t be afraid . . . I am coming to you” he tells them (14:27–28). The Advocate can become his presence with us, his voice within us. *His* peace is the greatest peace. It can endure even in the face of turmoil and suffering. It is a deep calm that comes from spiritual confidence and trust. As Paul said, “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). This deep and calm trust guards you, protects you from emotional explosions, from depression, and from fear.

Jesus was frequently worried about his apostles. Here he is assuring them that they can have inner peace even after he leaves them. The peace he leaves with them is based on spiritual surety, not on outward, worldly success. They should trust that the Advocate will come to them, will guide and guard them.

You, too, should trust that he has sent the Advocate to you. You have a spiritual link with Jesus, and you can trust that he takes care of you with a fatherly and motherly love. The Spirit of Truth will lead you into all Truth (John 16:13). Cultivate the bond by learning to reflect calmly and quietly, seeking the presence of the Spirit. Trust in Jesus’ revelatory work. Know that you will become a joint heir with Christ of the kingdom. Learn about his unique kind of peace, one rooted in the deep parts of your spiritual experience, if you have let the Spirit of Truth in. “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Think upon that—what we cannot see with our human eyes will be our greatest connection, our communication and communion with Christ and God, through the Spirit. Let your hidden life, your inner life, be enriched by communion with them.