

Psalm 104:34-37 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will praise my God while I have my being. May these words of mine please him; I will rejoice in the LORD. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Hallelujah! (43)

Introduction

Today's the celebration of Pentecost. According to the book of Acts, this is the day the Holy Spirit of God arrives, fueling tongues of flames hovering above the heads of the disciples who have been left by the one they followed and loved. Amid spontaneous tongues of fire, the disciples begin speaking and all there were able to hear them—like, listen and hear them. Whether the disciples were spontaneously speaking in different languages or those present were able to hear the message in their own language isn't the point. The point is that there was proclamation and there was proclamation being heard. The Gospel gossiped the Gospel.¹ All of it due to the presence of the Holy Spirit, very God sent *into* the world to move in hearts and minds of people, to usher people and the world into life out of death from the kingdom of humanity into the reign of God.

The arrival of the Spirit among the humble followers of the way confirmed these had the divine power to preach and proclaim the gospel, the witness of Jesus the Christ died and raised and ascended. Never again would the presence of God be isolated to material structures protected by very specific people. In Pentecost, everything is blown wide open: all are the worthy vessels of the Spirit of God (no in group, no privileged few, no elite clique). From hovering over the face of the deep in Gen 1, the Spirit of God moves through time and space perpetuating God's love at every twist and turn of the manifold pathways of the cosmos and bringing that love straight to you in a personal and intimate way through encounter with God in the event of faith. The long promised new spirit and new hearts for *all* of God's people is fulfilled in the arrival of God's Spirit among the disciples.

This is a remarkable claim. A most profound and revolutionary claim rivaling the claim of life out of death in resurrection. The presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer eliminates any possibility of exile from God; there's no where you can run and hide where God isn't because by faith you are yoked into God because God by the presence of the Spirit lives in you. God transcended God's self to be born of a woman and to take the regular name, Yeshua/Jesus. Even more profound is God continues to transcend God's self by taking up residence in our hearts and minds. We are, to quote St. Paul, the vessels of the holy spirit. We are clay, and we crack and fracture, and we are very much good but not perfect, yet we're the beloved and worthy by our simple existence to be in and with God and God to be in and with us.

¹ Rudolf Bultmann *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* Trans. GR Beasley-Murray, RWN Hoare, JK Riches. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster 1971. Original: *Das Evangelium des Johannes* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964). 554 "Their witness is not, therefore, a historical account of that which was, but—however much it is based on that which was—it is 'repetition,' 'a calling to mind,' in the light of their present relationship with him. In that case it is perfectly clear that their witness and that of the Spirit are identical. The Gospel is itself evidence of the kind of witness this is, and of how that which was is taken up again..."

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Whenever the Paraclete comes, whom I, / will send to you from beside the Father, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, that one will witness concerning me. And now you, *you* are witnesses, that from the beginning you are with me. (Jn 15:26-27)²

The above is certainly good news, yet John the elder has more to say about the Spirit of God, the Paraclete: The Paraclete continues the revolution of God started by Christ. The work Jesus started on earth isn't over. The Paraclete will come and will continue the divine witness³ of love embodied and manifested by Christ.⁴ Thus, John affirms Jesus's ministry was not a singular and isolated historical event relegated perpetually to what was. What Jesus did in the world materially by his presence and activity remains in the present even when he leaves ("you, *you* are witnesses") and surges into the future when the Paraclete arrives ("that one will witness concerning me"). God's revelation of God's revolutionary and liberating love set everything in motion and continues world without end.

In other words, with the arrival of the Paraclete God clearly isn't done with the cosmos; nothing and no one is too far gone, without hope and possibility, or too sick, dirty, anxious, and other to be beyond God's revolutionary and liberating love. In Christ the disciples witnessed God go to the fringes of their society, liberating and rescuing those who were isolated and shut out by the local rulers and religious authorities. The divine pursuit of the beloved was an intentional confrontation with human made systems of the day. It's these systems causing death and captivity for the children of God from which Jesus called forth life and liberty in material and spiritual forms. Jesus's work and activity while alive is as much a part of the divine witness as is his death and resurrection and ascension. So, it is this entire witness the disciples are witnessing to and which the Paraclete will continue to witness into the ages. The Paraclete comes so there will always be witness to the divine revolution of love and liberty in the world in the hearts and minds of disciples who'll participate in witnessing in their time, culture, and context.⁵

² Translation mine unless otherwise noted.

³ Bultmann *John* 553 "This two-fold designation makes the reference to the idea of revelation certain; even after Jesus' departure, God's revelation will be mediated through him: *he* it is, who sends the Spirit (sic, without additional description), who bears witness to *him*; but he does so in his unity with the Father, who has made him Revealer; he sends the Spirit from the *Father*; the Spirit proceeds from the *Father*, just as it is said in 14:16 that the Father sends the Spirit at the Son's request, or in 14.26 that he sends him 'in the name' of the Son."

⁴ Bultmann *John* 552 "After Jesus' departure, the situation on earth will remain unchanged inasmuch as the offence which Jesus' work offered the world will not disappear. The witness, which till now he had borne to himself, will be taken over by the Paraclete, the Helper, whom he will send from the Father."

⁵ Bultmann *John* 554 "But when...the Spirit's witness and the witness of the community are spoken of as two factors distinct from one another, this shows first that the working of the spirit is not unhistorical or magical, but rather requires the disciples' independent action, and secondly that the disciples cannot accomplish on their own what they are in fact able to do. They may not rely on the Spirit, as if they had no responsibility or need for decision; but they may and should trust the Spirit. Thus the peculiar duality, which exists in the work of Jesus

But I spoke these things to you because the grief in your hearts is made full. But I, I say the truth to you, it is profitable to you that I, I go away. For if I do not depart then the Paraclete will not come to you. Now, if I go, I will send [the Paraclete] to you. (Jn 16:5-7)

According to what Jesus says here, without the arrival of the Paraclete there will be no assuaging of the disciples' grief—his presence may cease their grief but only temporarily. If Jesus doesn't ascend, then the witness and revolution of divine love will last only while Jesus lives on earth. Due to Jesus's resurrection being bodily, this is a finite time conditioned on human health and protection from danger—both being rather tenuous for Jesus. By ascending and sending the noncorporeal Paraclete who can live in and among the believers and followers, the divine witness of love begun by Jesus never ends.⁶ No matter the threat of death, the passing of time, or variance of cultural context, the Paraclete goes and exposes systems and liberates captives in ways Jesus wouldn't be able to do⁷—he would've been restricted by his body to his time and context. With the presence of the Paraclete all who grieve are consoled, all who are stripped of the power to speak have an advocate, all who are anxious and burdened are comforted, all who need help have a helper, all who find themselves without words have an intercessor, and the Paraclete comes to all who call out and need aid—in any culture, from any context, in every age. This is certainly the divine revolution of love.

Conclusion

Still I have many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them just now. But when that one comes, the Spirit of truth, [they] will guide you into all truth. For [the Paraclete] will not speak from [themselves] but will speak as much as [they] hear and will report back to you the things that come. (Jn 16:12-13).

The Paraclete isn't stuck in the context and culture of Acts 2; the Paraclete isn't bound by time or era. The Paraclete informs us as we are to be informed and then will inform the next generation of Christians as they need to be informed, which won't be as we've been informed. The way we are being informed today is not the way our foremothers and forefathers in the

himself, repeats itself in the Church's preaching: *he* bears witness, and the *Father* bears witness. But the community's preaching is to be none other than witness to Jesus..."

⁶ Bultmann *John* 558 "...the historical Jesus must depart, so that his significance, the significance of being the Revealer, can be grasped purely by itself. He is only the Revealer, if he *remains* such. But he remains it only by sending the Spirit; and he can only send the Spirit when he has himself gone. In context the statement means the same as the others, that Jesus must be exalted or glorified in order to be the one who he really is."

⁷ Bultmann *John* 562-3 "The judgment consists in the world's sinful nature being exposed by the revelation that continues to take place in the community. This is brought out by relating the ελεγχειν of the Paraclete to the three dimensions αμαρτια, δικαιοσυνη, and χριστις. The absence of the article proves that it is the three *ideas* that are called in question, and not three *cases* of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It would therefore be wrong to supplement the three substantives with three subjective genitives...The judgment that takes place in the revelation consists in disclosing the true meaning of the standards and values current in the word. But this means at the same time disclosing who is the sinner, who the victor, and who it is that is judged."

faith were informed. Jesus withheld information from his disciples because they couldn't hear it; the Paraclete was given the privilege of revealing and witnessing to God into different cultures and contexts, among different peoples. Today can never be yesterday and tomorrow will never be today; God cannot be captured and caught by time or people. Why do we confuse the consistency of God's love with God being stuck in some romanticized version of history?

The questions we have today need answers that haven't been given before. No matter how great the bible is, how brilliant philosophers of yesterday were, or how insightful theologians have been, they can't directly address our questions in 2021. Thus, we're reliant on the presence of the Paraclete to guide us into truth through exposure and comfort that leads to the revolution of the witness of God. First, we ourselves are guided by love into exposure because we must always be in the truth of who we are and where we are and find ourselves therein received and accepted. Second, we're guided by love and truth to participate in exposing archaic, static, and septic traditions and rituals, systems and ideologies. Last, we're guided by love to work in the world as beloved radical midwives of comfort, love, and liberty participating in the revolution of bringing forth the reality of God manifested in Christ by the power Spirit of truth, the Paraclete.⁸

Let us live and liberate, let us laugh and love like those profoundly impacted in heart and mind by the life, liberation, laughter, and love of God made known in the witness of Christ in the world by the presence and power of the Paraclete.

⁸ Thought influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Christ, Reality, and the Good" of his *Ethics*