

23MAY10 Text: John 14:26 ***“The Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you.”***

Helen Keller was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, a small rural town in northwest Alabama. She was born with full sight and perfect hearing. However, in February 1882, when Helen was nineteen months old, she became ill. To this day the true nature of her illness remains a mystery. The doctors of her time called it “brain fever.” Modern doctors think it may have been scarlet fever or meningitis. Whatever the illness, Helen was so sick she was expected to die. After a while, the fever subsided and Helen’s family rejoiced, believing their daughter to be well again. However, Helen’s mother soon noticed how her daughter was failing to respond when the dinner bell was rung or when she passed her hand in front of her daughter’s eyes. Finally the truth fell heavily upon Helen’s parents: Helen’s illness had left her **both blind and deaf!**

The following few years proved very hard for Helen and her family. Helen became a very difficult child, smashing dishes and lamps and terrorizing the whole household with her wild screaming and temper tantrums. By the time Helen was six years old, her family had become desperate. Looking after Helen was proving way too much for them to handle. In a final act of desperation, Helen’s parents traveled to a specialist doctor in Baltimore for advice. The doctor confirmed their worst fears—Helen would never see or hear again—but they were told not to give up hope. The doctor believed that Helen could be taught and he advised them to visit a local expert on the problems of deaf children. This local expert was Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone. Bell was now concentrating on what he considered his true vocation, the teaching of deaf children. On the advice of Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, the parents of Helen Keller sent for a teacher from the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts.

**The teacher’s name was Anne Sullivan, a 19-year-old orphan, who was given the task of instructing 6-year-old Helen.** It was the beginning of a **close** and **lifelong** friendship between them. By means of a manual alphabet, Anne “spelled” into Helen’s hand such words as doll or puppy. Two years later Helen was reading and writing Braille fluently. At age 10, Helen learned different sounds by placing her fingers on her teacher’s larynx and feeling the vocal vibrations.

Later Helen went to Radcliffe College, where Anne spelled out the lectures into Helen’s hand. After graduating with honors, Helen decided to devote her life to helping the blind and deaf. As part of that endeavor, she wrote many books and articles and traveled around the world making speeches. Since Helen’s speeches were difficult to understand, Anne often translated them for her. Their nearly **50 years of companionship** ended when Anne died in 1936. Helen wrote these endearing words about her lifelong friend: ***“My teacher is so near to***

*me that I scarcely think of myself **apart** from her. I feel that **her being is inseparable** from my own, and that the **footsteps of my life** are in **hers**. All the **best of me** belongs to **her**—there is not a talent or an inspiration or a joy in me that has not been awakened by her loving touch.”*

In many ways, what teacher Anne Sullivan **was** to the blind and deaf Helen Keller, the Holy Spirit **is** to you and to me and to each and every believer. **There is nothing pertaining to our Christian faith and life that has not first been awakened by the loving touch of God the Holy Spirit!** All the best of you and me, all the **fruits of the Spirit** that adorn your life and mine—*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control*—they all started in the work of the Holy Spirit. Before His gracious hand touched our lives in Holy Baptism, before we were called to faith and adopted into God’s family, we were in a sad state. We were spiritually **blind, dead, and enemies** of God! All of that *changed* when God the Holy Spirit entered our hearts in Baptism to begin His gracious work. Yes, our life in Christ **began** and has been **nurtured** to this present day by a **teacher so near and dear** to us that we dare not think of our spiritual life *apart from* His loving presence, the presence of God the Holy Spirit!

Our Gospel lesson this morning records the words of our Lord to His disciples and His promise to them that after He leaves them, God the Father will send them the “Helper.” The original word our Lord uses here is “**Paraclete**,” a word that means, “**the One who is called along side of.**” What a great description of the Holy Spirit: the Paraclete, the One who sticks closely by the side of each Christian believer—day in and day out—helping, encouraging, comforting, counseling, strengthening, guiding, and so much more! How blessed we are indeed to have

**THE HELPER SENT BY GOD.**

This morning we’ll see some of the ways in which the **Helper**, the **Paraclete**, the **Holy Spirit**, *called along side of* each believer, is such a blessing to our lives each and every day.

The first way in which the Holy Spirit, our Helper, is such a blessing to us, is in how He **guides** us in our lives as He enlightens and sanctifies the lives of God’s children. Our Helper does this very intentionally through means, the means of grace: the Word of God and the sacraments. Through these precious means of grace, He works in our lives, He removes sin’s darkness as He **enlightens**, He **sanctifies** our lives and makes them more Christ-like and He daily and richly He **forgives** your sins and mine and the sins of all believers. By these actions, the One called along side of us, guides and directs our lives.

This action of the Holy Spirit reminds me the current GPS guidance devices like the Garmin or the TomToms. A Garmin is an *in-the-car guidance systems* that has a little computer screen and a computer-generated voice that guides the driver to his or her destination. When you type in your destination and press the “Go” button, the screen lights up and the voice begins giving directions. *“Turn right, go one mile, turn left...you are now approaching the highway, get on this entrance ramp, take this exit, and so on.”* These devices are *valuable* and help in preventing a person from *getting lost* on the way to their destination.

Our **destination** as children of God is **heaven** and our **Helper** guides us along life’s winding paths to our final destination. He does this through the word of God’s **Law** which points out to us when we have strayed from the proper path. When we **sin** and **take a detour** from the path God would have us walk or when we go in a different direction, a direction that is contrary to God’s perfect will for our lives, then the Holy Spirit uses the Law of God to **confront us** with our sin, to show us where we have gone astray and to call us back to **repentance**. When we sin, He says to us, *“Don’t go there, that is spiritually dangerous for your life...come, walk on the path of life.”* For example, it was God the Holy Spirit who led King David to repent of his many sins in his affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) and his attempted cover-up that led to Uriah’s death as the prophet Nathan spoke the word of God’s Law to David (2 Sam. 12) and led him to sorrow over his sin and then to repentance. God the Holy Spirit then spoke words of forgiveness to King David through Nathan assuring him that his sin was forgiven and taken away. It was God the Holy Spirit who led the disciple Peter to weep bitter tears of repentance after he denied Christ three times (Matt. 26:75) on the night of our Lord’s betrayal. When Isaiah was called by God the Holy Spirit to be God’s prophet and Isaiah was overwhelmed by the majesty of God and His holiness and overcome by his own sinfulness and lack of clean lips, it was God the Holy Spirit who assured Isaiah of the forgiveness of his sins as he touched the prophets lips with the burning coal from the altar of God. (Is. 6) **It is the same Holy Spirit who comes to your life and mine when we have sinned to assure us of God’s forgiveness.** How does He do this? In the words of **absolution** spoken by the pastor here in worship, in the words of the preached **Gospel** that declare again and again Christ’s saving work on our behalf when He died for all of our sins on Calvary, and in the **Lord’s Supper** in which we receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given and shed for us, the Holy Spirit assures us of the forgiveness of our sins again and again. How precious is the Helper sent by God!

God the Holy Spirit also comes to your life and mine to **strengthen** our lives when our **faith is weak and faltering**. He is not only our Helper, He is also our **Comforter**...and that English word comes from the Latin, *“forte”* which means “strong.” **He comes and makes our**

**faith strong when it is weak.** One of my favorite promises in Holy Scripture is Isaiah 42:3: ***“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”*** When our faith is bruised and battered by trials and temptations, He does not come and look at our pathetic faith and snap it off the rest of the way! No, instead God comes and tenderly binds up our broken faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, our Helper. And when our faith is nothing more than a smoldering, sputtering wick, about ready to totally go out, He does not extinguish it the rest of the way...just the opposite, He does everything in His power to fan that smoldering faith of ours back into a brilliant flame! And when our faith is so weak or we are so confused and turned upside-down by what we have experienced—perhaps the sudden death of a loved one or the diagnosis of serious illness or the loss of our job or a dozen other events that leave us reeling—at those very times, our Helper comes to us and prays for us before the Father. He speaks the very words needed on our behalf at those very times we when ourselves don’t know what to pray for or how to pray perhaps don’t even feel like praying in the first place. St. Paul writes in Romans 8: *“In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”* (26, 27) Then the Holy Spirit brings to mind those promises of God contained in His Word, at our times of doubt and when our faith is weak, promises like the one that follows these very verses just heard: *“And we know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”* (28) All things working together for our good, God causing the bad and the disappointing and the disheartening to serve His purpose of keeping us in the faith until life’s end by the power of the Holy Spirit. **What a Helper we have!!**

*Holy Spirit, the Dove sent from heaven*

*Ever One with the One who is Three*

*From the Father You came,*

*Words of peace to proclaim,*

*Come and comfort us, **speak tenderly**...*and He does! God be praised for the Holy Spirit: the Paraclete, the One who sticks closely by the side of each Christian believer—day in and day out—tenderly helping, encouraging, comforting, counseling, strengthening, guiding, and so much more! How blessed we are indeed to have **THE HELPER SENT BY GOD!**

Amen.

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