



But the Advocate,
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.
John 14:26

We Lutherans are not quite as comfortable talking about this Holy Spirit thing. It's not that we don't want to: we don't necessarily look down on our Baptist siblings in Christ, for instance, who seem much more willing to extravagantly speak of the Holy Spirit in worship and throughout their ministry. It's just...we Lutherans have been shaped to focus on God the Father and God the Son. That's easier for us to grasp, after all; much simpler for us to relate to in prayer and our all-around journey of faith. Nevertheless, every once in a while, we Lutherans need reminded of that other most precious member of the Trinity for us and all of God's children.

Yes, we may not always have the words to describe or understand the Holy Spirit for ourselves. So today, the Scripture invites us to consider how that very life-enriching Spirit has been an advocate for us, not just in the sense of advocating on our behalf to others, but helping *us* realize that all the love the entire Trinity has to offer is meant for us, too: advocating to us directly, to convince us that we are thoroughly cherished by God, including through the days when we are not so sure we have much left to offer the world at all.

I will be the first to admit I am just as guilty as anyone in not talking quite as much about the Holy Spirit. And yet, that essential role of *advocate* inspires me think back to a time in my life when I was not so sure about doing this whole pastor thing. I still remember the first time the idea was brought up to me directly, at least. It was on Confirmation Sunday in the congregation I grew up through my younger years. Oddly enough, that is the day for many Lutheran churches when the Holy Spirit tends to get brought up quite a bit: when the confirmands kneel and the pastor places their hands on the child of God and says, "Stir up in [them] the gift of [the] Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever." But when the pastor said those words with his hands on my head, I didn't feel a jolt or anything. I didn't feel a rush of the Holy Spirit or something taking over me.

Instead, what I remember more about that day is, for some crazy reason, being asked to read one of the Scripture passages for worship. I remember being so nervous, no matter how many times I practiced saying it out-loud at home. I remember being completely relieved when it was over, after having to do that in front of the congregation, with all those up-standing Christians in the pews. And then, after worship, when people were invited to congratulate us in the room behind the sanctuary, this one person had the audacity, this absolutely crazy idea in her head, telling me I should consider being a pastor, because of how I spoke the Scripture or something. I don't know if the Holy Spirit inspired her to say it, necessarily, but I must have thought I didn't have nearly enough Holy Spirit flowing through *me* to make me worthy of serving in the church whatsoever. I thought that the pastor who placed his hands over me earlier that morning must have been perfect to serve in that role; that he must have had the right amount of Holy Spirit to serve God in that way. And yet, I suppose that person in the back room was advocating to me that not only was I cherished by God, but that imperfect me still had something to offer.

As the years went by, I gradually caved into the whole ministry idea. I suppose the Holy Spirit had something to do with that. However, the pastor who had placed his hands on my head on Confirmation Sunday, the pastor who I actually started paying attention on the Sunday mornings following that, the one I started to admire during those years when I really dug in more deeply into what God and the church was all about; he, like most pastors, moved on to somewhere else soon enough. I remember feeling a little more distant from the church, then, including from God, which affected me to the point of wondering if I truly had any Holy Spirit flowing through me to serve God at all.

Then, during some summers of my college years, I took on a job as a camp counselor, as I was attempting to figure out if this whole church thing was truly the way to go. And during one of those summers, I was asked to lead a worship at that home congregation with those upstanding Christians in the pews for one Sunday morning. I remember reluctantly caving into that most intimidating idea. I remember being so nervous about it. After all, it was anxiety-filled enough just to read a Scripture passage before them, let alone leading an entire worship. The new interim pastor must have sensed something was up.

What happened then may not seem like much in the grand scheme of the life-altering extravagant work of the Holy Spirit, but I remember him making the drive to the church camp. And that day was an absolute down pour of rain. I still remember him getting out of his car at the other end of the camp, and walking all the way to where I was, to not only give me paper copies of what the worship would like that upcoming Sunday morning, but to just, I guess, do his own Holy Spirit-inspired work to advocate to me that even imperfect me had something to offer to God, to the church, to the people in the pews who may just be imperfect, too.

Looking back at that moment that may not seem like much, I consider how the Holy Spirit tends to walk through the downpour of our pain and guilt and wonderings of if we're good enough. Or, actually, that the Holy Spirit is already there beside us when we do not even realize it. And, time and time again, the Holy Spirit will advocate to us, will convince us, that we can walk through the downpour as well. That we are not only loved by God, and not only worth standing beside, but that God believes in us to the point that no matter what is poured down upon us, we still have more than enough Holy Spirit flowing through us to make an impact for the better. More than enough Holy Spirit flowing through us all our days, because well, God simply, but beautifully, refuses have it any other way. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!