

His Presence

Knowing Your Counselor:

Acts 2:1-8, 37-39, John 14:15-21, 26

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Next Sunday, as we honor those who died to preserve our freedom, we will also take time to dedicate some memorials and remember two special people: Ardis Peterson, who died last summer, and David Hardke, who was buried this past Monday. Just two weeks ago, David was here to worship and receive prayer even though he was jaundiced and weak. As noted in his funeral bulletin, when David was injured in a horrific motorcycle accident in 1967, he was left partially paralyzed and bitter. A couple of our men took a video camera over to the nursing home. They wanted to capture his testimony of transformation. Instead, of a short testimony, they got a lengthy sermon. Now, I wonder, who gave him the example of a lengthy sermon? The question remains, “What changed David from a bitter victim to a grateful messenger of good news?”

Last Sunday, Diane, Joe and I attended a United Methodist Church in Dallas. The youth led the worship, and a graduating senior gave the message. She seasoned her talk with humor as she told her difficult story. Her father was an alcoholic and an embarrassment. Two years ago, he took his life. Following his death, her mother was diagnosed with cancer. The young girl medicated her pain by getting drunk and stoned. She used these substances continuously. However, something her mother said got to her. Her mother spoke a word of affection, affirmation and destiny into her spirit. The drugs and alcohol didn't fit with the word she

received and believed. She stopped using them completely. As she talked, it became apparent that some people at this little United Methodist Church had been reaching out to her. They had pursued her, inviting her, inviting her, inviting her. Finally, when she came to church, they embraced her with patient and loving arms. To some degree, the church became an extended family for her, and that was important especially when her mother died. As she talked, despite the humor, it was clear that she had unresolved hurt. However, she was pushing on. For her, school was a struggle, yet now she was only 10 days away from graduating and was accepted into a college some distance away. Clearly these were important steps and works of grace. However, something was missing. She felt the support of church people and the love of her mother, but someone was missing. She lacked a significant relationship with somebody, and therefore his name was not mentioned in her talk. After all, we speak about those closest to us. We speak about those who give us counsel, who lift us when we are down. We speak about those we rely on when the chips are down. We speak about those who touch us deeply. Someone was missing from her story because at this point, she did not know if and how he was helping her... or even if he was involved. She was not close to him, and he was not in her thinking. Moreover, a consequence of this special relationship was missing, that she felt deeply loved, valued and destined. Is there something missing in your story and daily speech?

We might say this gifted high school senior was orphaned; and though she has knowledge of her parents, it will become distant and somewhat remote as she lives without them. In contrast to an orphaned relationship, Jesus promised his disciples they would not be orphaned:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18, NIV)

On the day of Pentecost, the Counselor came to the followers of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus, who ascended to his place in the courtroom of God, came by spirit to live in his people. He promised:

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:20, NIV)

Would you like to know who the most influential adviser to President Barack Obama is? Is it Rahm Emanuel who serves as his chief of staff? Is it the Senior Advisor to the President, David Axelrod? Is it Michelle Obama his wife? The most influential position anyone can have in another person is inside their head and heart. Whoever is inside our President's head and heart has huge influence, and whoever is inside your head and heart has profound influence with you. In an act of brilliance, God placed the Counselor in the heads and hearts of Jesus' followers, so that Jesus was actually in them. Look what happened on the day of Pentecost.

The followers of Jesus were overwhelmed by the presence of Jesus in them. They were drunk with joy. They were intoxicated with God's love. They had no sense of guilt, condemnation or estrangement from God. They were so boisterous and joyful that people thought they were drinking. Among the first things influenced by Jesus' presence was their speech:

We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues! (Acts 2:11, NIV)

Brothers and sisters, what the disciples did was not taught. It was the effect of the counselor's presence and position in their hearts and heads. Do you want to know why David Hardke didn't remain bitter, why he devoured the Scriptures, believed the impossible and talked continuously of Jesus? It was the Counselor and the position he had with David.

Do you know why I stand before you today? I didn't take a test and figure out what career I'd like. I didn't admire my dad so much that I decided to do what he did. I didn't stop and think what am I good at. I stand before you today because your Creator answered Jesus' prayer and sent the promised Counselor into the most influential position in my life. Jesus has taken up residency in my head and heart and I'm overwhelmed by God's love and mercy. I'm a recipient of good news, and I'm a herald of it. I devour the Holy Bible daily because the Counselor keeps pointing stuff out to me. More times than not, I walk away from the Bible absolutely excited with my heart burning (and I'm not talking about acid-reflux). I do forget the words. I do get distracted. I do get discouraged. I do become angry. I do become afraid; however, the Counselor doesn't leave me. If he can't talk in me, if he can't get my attention, he often confronts me by speaking through someone else. Pretty soon, I realize I've been grieving him with an angry, unforgiving heart. I find that I've been dismissing him with unbelieving thoughts and attitudes. Often, I'm overwhelmed again by his love and mercy. Tears drip down my face and my nose runs. Laughter explodes from my lungs as I enjoy such love.

Did you know that this gift of the Holy Spirit – Counselor is promised to all of us?

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off... (Acts 2:39, NIV)

Did you know that for some of you, the Creator answered Jesus' prayer and sent the Counselor into your heart and head, but for a long time he hasn't been able to talk with you about some things? You've been grieving him with your unforgiving anger at someone or something and you've been dismissing him with your unbelief and fear. How long will you keep this up? Right now, he is making his appeal to you through me. He's directing me to say that he really loves you. He wants you to again feel that love. He wants to show you so many things because

he loves you so much. He wants to show you a plan he has for your gifts at this time in your life, but you've turned your eyes away to problems and fears. The counselor came when you invited Jesus into your heart, but you're ignoring what you already learned from him. Realize he loves you and receive his forgiveness again. Then he'll show you the path.

Others of you, don't understand much of this. You believe the facts about Jesus, but all this talk of a personal relationship and a Counselor within you is a bit too mystical. You don't relate to it. It seems hokey, flaky, and possibly dangerous. You don't want to lose a solid grip on reality and truth. You are afraid of being overrun by something you don't understand.

The problem is you believe the facts about Jesus (just like the devil does); but you don't believe Jesus' word. If you believed his word, you would ask the Lord to forgive your unbelief and help you believe and act on his word. You would ask him to show you that you are forgiven, to help your heart receive what he died for. God has sent me to you... because he loves you. He wants me to tell you that he knows your struggle with faith. He knows where the doubt and fear come from. He loves you just the same and has paid for your sins. He wants you to welcome his forgiveness now and then pass it on. He wants you to forgive those who have hurt you. The weight you carry in that hurt robs you of the peace and joy you need for your mission today. As you forgive and receive his forgiveness, you will taste his peace, right now. You will leave with a spring in your step and a joy in your heart. Are you ready?

Then just talk to him. Call on him and he will answer. Also, I give you an invitation. Feel free to join me afterwards. Share with me what is going on. There is a gift and blessing in telling what God is doing in your life. There is also a blessing God gives when we discuss and pray about those things that are on our hearts. I'm here for you to experience that.