

December 7, 2014

“COUNSELOR”

Psalm 1 1 John 2:1-2 John 14:15-17

In Proverbs 8:12-22, if Wisdom could speak, it might say: *“I, Wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. I have counsel and wisdom, I have insight, I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles govern the earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek diligently find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries. The Lord created me at the beginning of His work...”*

From the beginning of time, there has been such a thing as wisdom. It has always been available to us, like a sweet fruit ready to be plucked and savored, ready to nourish us if only we had the sense to reach up and take hold of it. Wisdom is the possession of good counsel. And a good counselor always offers the best advice. *“By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles govern the earth.”* (Proverbs 8:15-16)

In the first Psalm, good counsel is connected with the Law: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.... But his delight is in the Law of the Lord...”* (vs. 1-2)

Today, we often hear lawyers referred to as counselors. Such a counselor advises people about the law. But such a counselor also defends the law, stands up for the law, and does what is right. Now, a *Wonderful Counselor* would be one who is always there to advise, always standing in defense of truth and justice, and, always doing what is right. Isaiah foresaw the coming of a king so great that he would be called not just a Counselor, but a *Wonderful Counselor!*

The New Testament term for such a person is *paraclete*, which literally means *one called to the side of*, as in someone who stands by to aid and uphold. But like the lawyer, it also indicates someone who pleads as an advocate. So in the First Letter of John it is proclaimed that *“We have an advocate (a paraclete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous... and He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”* (2:1-2)

Now, imagine that you have a lawyer so dedicated to defending you from all the accusations brought against you that he or she might say, “If this person is guilty, I’ll take their punishment.” And then, when your guilt is proven, you are set free and your lawyer goes to jail! Imagine, then, that the sentence is over, the time has been served (by your lawyer!), and now you are being accused again. And again, your lawyer goes to jail in your place. And it happens again, and again, and again! And each time, your lawyer goes to jail in your place. Isn’t that a wonderful lawyer? A wonderful counselor?! Imagine finally, that you have done something so terrible, so heinous, so cruel as to deserve the death penalty, and even then (!) your lawyer takes your place! Your lawyer dies for you!

How would you feel toward your lawyer? *“He is the expiation for our sins!”* God is our judge and Jesus Christ is pleading our case before God. Jesus Christ has *already* pleaded our case before God, and, Jesus Christ has *already* taken the punishment...the worst punishment we could ever deserve! And even now, Jesus Christ is constantly vindicating us before our ultimate accuser, Satan! And even though the record of our lives accuses us, and our guilt is proven a thousand times over, we are set free as though innocent. There’s the gift of Christmas! The greatest gift of all! Because Christmas is the coming of that Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ!

Imagine, perhaps, a different kind of advocacy on your behalf, the advocacy of healing. Imagine a doctor who is somehow able to take away your pain by taking it upon himself. Imagine this doctor being able to relieve you of the consequences of your illness even by going to the extreme of going through the surgery for you! This is the kind of savior we have, one who would willingly suffer in order

to save us from suffering. And though it is not a physical suffering that we are saved from, it is a salvation of the spirit!

In the Eighth Chapter of the Gospel of John (v. 1-11), a wonderful lesson is learned. Jesus became an advocate for a woman guilty of adultery, a crime which, in that day, was punishable by death, and still is, I believe, in some parts of the world. But Jesus stood up for her. Actually, he bent down for her and wrote with His finger on the ground. But in her defense, He discredited her accusers by forcing them to face their own guilt.

Now, I don't think the message here is that we should never accuse others of their sin, or, that we should never condemn unrighteous behavior just because we too are unrighteous. The lesson is that we should never insist on the idea that persons are irredeemable. Because we need to be redeemed too, we ourselves are not without guilt, and so, if we believe *we* are redeemable, we must believe that others are also redeemable. The most redeeming part of the story is that no one can truly accuse one person of guilt without facing their own. The second most redeeming part of the story is that the woman's accusers did bring her to Christ! And He is the Holy Advocate!

This Gospel story teaches us how Christ stands by even the accused and guilty sinner!

In the Fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we have the story of the Prodigal Son (v. 11-32). The way the story ends pictures the father standing before the older brother. The father entreats his older son to be kind in spite of the sin, to be loving in spite of the resentment he feels, to be peaceful and rejoice in spite of his anger. In his appeal to the older son, he said, "*All that is mine is yours.*" And in defense of his younger son, he said, "*He was lost, but now he's been found!*"

This Gospel story teaches us how Christ stands by the righteous – "*All that is mine is yours.*" – And, how Christ stands by the penitent sinner – "*This your brother was dead, and is alive!*"

Now we, as Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ, as followers of His Way, can be advocates as well. We can stand up for others and plead their case. We have seen it very strongly, (30, or so, years ago), very beautifully in those who did all they could to never let the hostages be forgotten. Appeal after appeal was made by the sister of Terry Anderson, the longest held hostage of all. She was a wonderful advocate for her brother. And there are countless other stories where someone has played the advocate, even played the martyr for others before hostage takers saying something to the effect of, "Take me, I'm the one you want. Let them go!" Yes, we can go to great lengths on the behalf of others. Human history, though it reveals the cruelty of hostage taking, is also the history of those who have given themselves on the behalf of others. We can plead their case, and we can defend them when they are accused, and we can trust in the truth that no one is irredeemable even fanatical hostage takers, for Jesus is the expiation "*not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*" As Christians, we are called to be advocates!

Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will keep My commandments. And I will pray the father*" – He will appeal to God the way an advocate would appeal to a judge – "*and He will give you another Counselor*" – a paraclete – the same word as in First John where it is translated advocate – "*to be with you forever*"

What a wonderful thing: *forever!* What a *Wonderful Counselor* that would be! ... "*even the Spirit of Truth*" – of wisdom, wherein resides, according to Proverbs Eight, prudence and knowledge and discretion and insight. By which the way of righteousness and the paths of justice are revealed. All this is given to the Christian disciple. "*You know Him, for He dwells with you*" -- this everlasting Counselor, this holy Advocate resides with the Christian disciple – "*and will be in you!*"

What a Wonderful Counselor!