

## The Counselor

Let us pray...Lord, I call Your Spirit to be among us this morning. Fill this place with Your presence, so that hearts may be opened and lives transformed. May Your Spirit guide the words and actions, that they may reflect Your love and truth. Amen

Yesterday was the first day of summer, but I wish to read a passage of scripture from Isaiah 9:6, we usually hear at Christmas... 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

A word that has been increasingly familiar in our vocabulary in the past few years, is the word, **counselor**. We are all accustomed with counselors and counseling. The position of counselor is a very familiar occupation in our society today. If you Google the word and your location, you can find marriage counselors, wedding counselors, guidance counselors, drug counselors, vocational counselors, rehabilitation counselors, school counselors, and so on and so on.

We heard the word counselor in that Isaiah reading, as well as in the John chapters Donna read this morning.

Here in our part of the world, counseling has become very much a part of our lives. It is estimated that one in ten people are said to be currently seeing a counselor of some description.

In addition to professional counseling, all of us receive counsel from family, friends and maybe work associates. Any informed person realizes the value of another person's insights. No one is an island of information by themselves; we need information from others, and so we ask our friends and associates about construction issues, accounting challenges, cars, boats, campers, recipe ideas and a lot of other things. We are constantly looking for better information to make intelligent decisions, and so we always consult others for help.

What makes for a good counselor?

First, a good counselor has a personal concern for others; the counselor is personally concerned and compassionate towards the needs of others. She or he is not a detached individual who listens for fifty minutes and then asks you to pay the fee. Rather, the mark of a good counselor is that they are truly concerned about your welfare.

The second point that marks a good counselor is empathy; he or she has an intuitive understanding and feeling of the person before them. Just as an electrician has a pretty good grasp of the problem before them; as does someone in electronics, mechanics or accounting. So a good counselor should have a pretty good understanding of the personality of the people they are dealing with.

Next, a good counselor has a harmonious relationship with their clients or customers; and their work ethic is up to specific high standards. This does not mean that a counselor is problem free, but they have their head and heart pretty well put together.

A fourth and last quality of a good counselor that I'll mention, is that, they should be a non-judgmental person. When we go to see a counselor, we unload all kinds of personal information and feelings about stuff we wouldn't share with many others; therefore it is important that the counselor does not condemn us for our feelings or actions. Condemnation and judgment would certainly inhibit communication of further feelings, exchanges or business.

So what is the purpose of a good counselor? A counselor tries to facilitate growth. They try to enable us as a person, to grow. We all have blocks on our paths to maturity. We all have blocks to our growth, such as a painful, early childhood trauma with parents or persistent personality problems or addictions or embarrassing personal habits that prevent us from growing into God's fullness for us. A counselor helps remove those blocks. Like when a person has a blood clot in the leg, medication may be given to dissolve that block. So a counselor works with the client to help dissolve those blocks that prevent them from growing. ... A counselor does not solve problems for people, but helps them grow stronger so they can solve problems and issues on their own. A counselor does not make hard decisions for people but they help them become strong so they can make their own choices.

Does a counselor have an ideal image, a goal that they are working towards? The answer is yes, a counselor has a vision of maturity, wholeness and harmony that their client is working towards.

**Many of the same words used to describe a good counselor are the same words used in the Bible verses we heard this morning. Words like counselor, guide, strengthen, enable, make stronger, teacher, truth, and these are all the same words that are used in these verses to describe the work of the Holy Spirit.**

John, chapters 14-16, are the high water mark in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. If you want to find out about the Holy Spirit, you can read the book of Acts, but an even better place to read about the Spirit is John 14-16. Within these three chapters, the Spirit is named “**counselor**”. The Spirit is called counselor five times in these chapters. The Counselor is to guide us into truth about ourselves, God and life.

These same chapters are the high water mark in the Bible in teaching about the **Trinity**. If you want to find out about the Trinity, you read these chapters. In the Gospel lesson for today, we hear that the Spirit is going to come to us in the future; and then a few verses later, the “I” am going to come to us; and then a few verses later, the Father is going to coming to us.

Now, why doesn’t the Bible make up its mind? Who is coming to us? The Spirit? Jesus? The Father? Which person is coming to us? Here in these chapters, we discover that God, the Father, the Son, the Spirit are used interchangeably.

But what stands out most clearly today is the Spirit is called the Counselor. God will not leave us desolate or orphans. The Greek word is, orphani; we will not be left as orphans in the universe but God’s Spirit will come to be with us and in us.

Today, I ask this question: What does it mean that God is our counselor? What does it mean for you? Later in the message, I will give you the chance to respond and answer that question, so please, think about it. What does it mean for you that God is your counselor?

The Greek word for counselor is “paraclete,” which means “called to the side of”. We get our word **parallel** from this origin. You call someone to be by your side and give you strength. For example, when there is a sudden tragedy in your life, the natural instinct is not to be left alone, but to have someone there with you, someone by your side, to give you strength. Or when you face a major decision, you often don’t want to think it through alone. You want input from other people as you intelligently go about making this decision. So you will call someone to be by your side, to talk through the options. That is what the word, counselor, means. It means: to call someone to be at your side, to give you strength and help as you sort out your decisions.

When we think of the Spirit of God as counselor, this means that the Holy Spirit is personally concerned about us. God, our counselor, is not a detached listener who listens politely to us for fifty minutes, asks for payment and then wants us to leave, so the next customer can get in. If the mark of a good counselor is that they are personally concerned about our welfare and well being, then God is truly a good counselor. God is truly concerned about what is good for us.

God, the Spirit, is an empathetic counselor. God, without question, understands the complexity of our inner being. Take a peek sometime at Psalm 139, it tells of God's understanding and love for us without reason: **"O God, you have searched me and you know me. You know all about me. From far away, you understand all my thoughts. You see me whether I am working or resting. Your knowledge of me is too wonderful and I cannot comprehend it."** Instantly, instinctively, intuitively, God understand every corner of our being.

The Spirit is a non-judgmental counselor. God, the Spirit, does not judge us for what we say, think or feel. Can you imagine God hearing every word we ever said; listening in on our every thought; seeing our every action? It is embarrassing to think that someone knows that much about us, seeing and hearing our every thought. And God still does not condemn us. Nor does God condone our thoughts and feelings and actions. But God does not condemn us in our humanness, and therefore we are free to tell God more.

The purpose of this Spirit/Counselor is to help us grow towards maturity and wholeness. The counselor is a facilitator of growth and maturity within us. We all have these blocks that prevent growth. Blocks of sin and imperfection. These qualities block us from becoming what God wants us to be. We have blocks due to the inner scars of childhood conflicts. Blocks due to our birth order. Blocks due to deeply rooted personality habits. Blocks possibly due to addictions. Blocks due to bad decisions and choices we have made. We all have these types blocks within us. ... What are those blocks in your inner life? What are those qualities which are preventing you from growing into maturity and wholeness? ... God, the Holy Spirit, helps us see the truth about ourselves, and our blocks that inhibits growth. God guides us into new directions and ways of dealing with our inner blocks.

Some people have the illusion that God, the Spirit, the Counselor, will solve all our problems. That is not true. Like any good counselor, the Spirit, enables us to become stronger. The Spirit/Counselor does not make decisions for you. Sometimes, that is just what we want; we want God to make the decisions for us, especially difficult decisions. Rather, God is the “paraclete” the one who comes to our side and gives us the strength and new resources and new insights, so we can make difficult and painful decisions. I repeat, the Spirit/Counselor does not solve our problems or make decisions for us. Nor does any good counselor. I like that passage from Philippians where God says that the love in us is to grow and grow and grow so that we will make the best choices. I like that; the focus is on love growing inside, whereby we can make the best choices.

So where do we find this counselor? I know where to find one locally. I use Google or Bing and look up Counseling Services and search. But where do I find this Spirit/Counselor? There are many places to find this Counselor but John 14-16 indicates that a good reliable place to find the Spirit is in the Spirit filled community, the church in whom the Spirit lives. You see, the church is a counseling community. The church is filled with people who are willing and able to give good counsel. The church itself is a counseling community, and God the Spirit counsels through the church.

What are the Spirit/Counselor’s office hours? I know when to telephone the counseling offices that I look up on the internet. Between 8:30 and 4:30. But why is it that my personal needs and emergencies are persistently after hours? Often, these needs and emergencies are between ten at night and three in the morning, and no professional offices are open. God, the Spirit/Counselor’s office hours are not from nine to five. Nor does God have any answering machine, saying he will get back to me later. Nor do I find a busy signal. God, the Spirit/Counselor lives inside of me and is available to listen anytime of day or night. **Anytime.**

Now I come back to that earlier question. What does it mean for you that God is your counselor? What does that mean for you personally, in your secular life? I will give you five seconds more to think about that question. I have shared with you some of my thinking about God, the Spirit/Counselor, and I would like to imagine people saying things like....

“Always there.” Yes, I agree with that and more importantly, the Bible agrees with that. God is always there to hear us, immediately, instantly. God is present. There are no busy signals, no answering machines.

Maybe you say, “God is there for me during all the big things, the tough moments, and tough decisions.” Yes, there is no problem too big for God, or too complicated for God. God helps us deal with tough decisions and complicated problems.

You might think, “There is no problem too small for God.” How true. It is not only the big issues of life but the million little issues that are important to us. In fact, you would never telephone a local counselor or some other PHD in counseling work, to talk over such little things that we talk over with God. Nothing is too insignificant for God.

Another possible thought you may have had, “God often sends me to the right people and to the right counselors who seem to give me good advice.” That’s a good one. God knows our need and knows with whom we need to talk to. So God sends us to the right people, or the right people happen to show up at the right time, and you didn’t even call them. God often speaks through them.

One thing for me, “It is important that I not only talk during the counseling session but listen.” How true. We can talk, talk, talk, talk our hearts out, but somewhere in the conversation, we need to be quiet and listen. Patiently listening for God’s direction and guidance is very important.

There may be an idea suggesting that, “God can handle it when I go off on a rant towards God or someone else, when I blow my stack, blow off a barrage of anger at God and tell Him he is doing a rotten job of managing the world and my life.”

**Absolutely**, God understands our need to honestly vent our feelings, to get it off our chest, to release the venom and black poison that we feel in our gut. God can handle that. In the Bible, these confessions are called laments. Jeremiah especially really lets God have it.

There might be a voice that is saying to you, “I can hear God’s still small voice inside of me. Maybe it is my conscience, telling me right and wrong, but I do hear that one small voice inside of me, although the voice is not audible.” So true. The text for today is clear: God, the Spirit/Counselor is going to come and live inside of us. God’s Spirit actually does live inside us, and we hear the voice of the Spirit, counseling and guiding us in the way of truth.

The church is the counseling community, counseling us in the ways of God and the way of love.

It was the evening of Holy Thursday and the disciples were gathered together for the last supper. This was Jesus' last meal with his disciples and he soon was to be leaving them to die on the cross. And he said, "When I go, I will not leave you deserted. I will not leave you orphans. But I will send my Spirit, the Counselor, who will live in you and guide you. I and my Father will come to live in you and we will guide you in the truth. We will be your Counselor.

Thanks be to God...

Amen.