

Dear Friends

At this season of Pentecost you may occasionally come across old hymns which include the word 'Paraclete'. It's an anglicised version of the Greek word *paraklétos*, which is used of the Holy Spirit in John chapters 14 to 16. What does it mean? Ah ...

It's one of those Greek words that is translated with a variety of different English words. Some versions say Comforter, others Counsellor, another alternative is Helper, and finally there's Advocate. I remember hearing a preacher ask his hearers the rhetorical question, which of these four English words is correct?

His answer? All of them.

Why would he say that? If you were to translate *paraklétos* literally it would be rendered 'one called alongside'. You can then see why each of the English alternatives are suggested.

A 'Comforter' comes alongside us in our time of need. Which of us haven't needed someone like that at times? What good news it is that the Spirit of God does that, too. We just need to remember that 'Comforter' is one of the older translations and that the word had slightly different connotations in the past. The 'fort' part is about strength, a usage that survives into modern English in words like 'fortitude'. The Comforter is the strength-giver.

This is famously communicated in the Bayeux Tapestry. Beneath a scene where William of Normandy is prodding one of his soldiers up the backside with his sword to get into the heat of the battle comes the caption 'King William comforteth his troops.' When the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, we are not merely given strength to cope, we are also given strength to rejoin the battle for the kingdom of God.

A 'Counsellor' also comes alongside us in our time of need. A counsellor listens, questions, and carefully guides so that we may find a way forward in life, perhaps through a distressing problem. This too makes sense spiritually, as it is through the Holy Spirit that we hear the voice of God leading us forward, even through difficulties.

Perhaps 'Helper' sounds a little bland – at least it does to me. But if the helper is one called alongside then we have an important image of the way God helps us. Just as Jesus came alongside the human race by taking on our flesh in the

Incarnation so now the Holy Spirit is alongside us spiritually to help. This is not some condescending charity from above. I'd rather have someone come alongside me in my time of need, wouldn't you?

I've saved 'Advocate' to last. If you had to push me to take just one of these four words, this is the one I would choose. I am thinking of its use in the Scottish legal system, where an advocate is an independent barrister. This works for me in the context of John 14-16 where much of Jesus' language envisions his followers as either literally or metaphorically on trial in the world for their beliefs. In this image, the Holy Spirit is our counsel for the defence, speaking for us and enabling us to be good witnesses. As I say, it makes sense of the context – and you must allow me this one, as I have a Scottish surname!

I hope this makes us want to invite the Holy Spirit to fill more of our lives than every before. As the Chris Bowater song puts it, 'Holy Spirit we welcome you.'

Every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Faulino". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.