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First United Methodist Church of Springboro

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John 16:4b-15

“What Kind of Counsel?”

We are in the season of the church that goes by different names. Some call it ordinary time. That sounds, well, very ordinary. Some call it Kingdomtide which sounds more exciting, but what does it mean? Some count the weeks after Pentecost. But that makes it seem as if the big event is over and now we’re on a countdown, waiting for the next big, exciting thing to happen.

I like to think of this time instead, as the season of the Holy Spirit. We tend to neglect the Holy Spirit in our conversations about faith and God. Maybe we don’t want to sound too Pentecostal. Maybe it’s because the Holy Spirit doesn’t fit into nice neat categories. Holy Java Sunday School class is currently studying a book called ***The Forgotten God*** which is about the Holy Spirit.

I like to think of this as the season of the Holy Spirit because it’s a season of spiritual growth, of digging deeper, and strengthening our faith. This is the work, the role of the Holy Spirit. Two weeks ago on Pentecost, we talked about the Holy Spirit as a coach, encouraging and challenging and inspiring us to practice and live out our faith.

Today, as we look at John 16, we want to build on this idea. We find here again this word Paraclete. In Greek it is translated to “the one who comes alongside” like a coach. In Latin, and in John’s description that we’ve read today, it translates into something like a legal advocate, one who will stand by you and help you in a court of law. Think of a time when you or someone you love has had to go to court over a legal matter. You certainly want someone to represent you who has a true grasp of what’s going on, who knows the law and the legal system, and who is on your side. That advocate counsels you in how to proceed for the best outcome and counsels the judge and others involved for your best interest.

This is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is the Spirit of Jesus that is now, because of the resurrection and ascension, about to be in all situations, times and places in a way that Jesus as the Incarnation was not.

The Holy Spirt then takes our side, makes a case for us, and instructs us on the best way to proceed. The Holy Spirit gives us wise counsel.

Think about your life. Who do you go to when you need wise counsel? Friends, family, teachers, lawyers, books, God? When do you go to them? Do you go regularly so that you have the resources to stay out of trouble? Or do you wait until trouble come along or everything falls apart around you and you have no choice?

I was thinking about all the different people I know and how they relate to wise counsel. Some never seek to out. They have the challenging combination of insecurity and stubborn pride and they’d rather crash and burn than admit that they need help from someone.

Some are good at seeking out counsel. They spend hours learning, getting input from everyone possible. The problem is, they never apply any of it. They keep doing things the same way and wonder why they don’t’ have a different outcome.

Some listen to the loudest or most forceful counsel. Surely if they are that confident they must know best. Some listen to the most popular. If everyone is doing it, it must be right.

But then there are those who take the time, who seek out and listen to wise counsel.

Wise counsel is rarely the loudest and often not the most popular, and usually not the easiest option. It often involves an “ouch” moment, some confession, and repentance. It’s usually not that black or white, this or that.

Instead, when wise counsel is given, it is the Holy Spirit working through the people around you, helping you see how to proceed and not to proceed. Pointing out the ways you might need to change. Encouraging you to keep on trusting, praying, hoping, loving. Sometimes the Holy Spirit works through those who don’t even realize it as they put that person who we don’t want to be like in our path to teach us what the long term effect of our choices will be.

The wise counsel given to us by the Holy Spirit is grounded in truth and shared in order to comfort, encourage and strengthen us on the way of life that Jesus lived and died so that we might have, that way of life that God so desires for us.

We need wise counsel. We can’t know it all or live this life on our own. We need to have that Holy Spirit’s counsel. It is Jesus speaking to us today, teaching us and guiding us in the way he would if he were here.

He tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will remind them of what he taught them when they need it. A lot like the lawyer who knows the law and goes back to find what is needed in the moment it is most needed.

What a gift! Because you know how you can tell someone something a hundred times and they hear you and acknowledge what you’re saying. But until the time comes when they really need to use it, it doesn’t really sink in. It doesn’t really compute.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will give us that reminder of what he said. And, he says, there are things that you will need to know, and things that those in other generations and places and times will need to know. But if I try to tell you now, you won’t understand. It might hurt you because you won’t be able to bear it. So the Holy Spirit will come and teach on my behalf in those situations. The Holy Spirit will show you and advocate for God’s will and way in those situations.

We as Christians, as United Methodists, believe this. It’s not all said and done, wrapped up in a neat little book with red letters. We believe that God is still speaking to us and revealing His direction and way in our dynamic and complicated world. The Bible surely gives us our foundation. But the Holy Spirit brings it to the needs of today. This is why we can in faith debate over some of these tricky issues that will come up at Annual Conference and General Conference. It’s because we trust that in the midst of these situations we will be drawing on the wise counsel of the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley has given us a framework for this. It’s often called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. It describes the resources we use to invoke the wise counsel of the Holy Spirit in making decisions for life today. Scripture is a strong part of that. It is the foundation. But we also believe the Spirit counsels us through tradition, reason, and experience. When we put these all together, we find wise counsel.

I invite you today, once again, as you are seeking wise counsel in your life for your relationships, for you job, for your mental and physical health, to turn to the Holy Spirit, the one who is your advocate and wise counselor, to listen and live out that wisdom.