

# Sermon

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev. Martha Sterne  
21 May, 2017



Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus through John to us: *Do your work—love one another—and you will receive the Paraclete, the Companion, the Spirit of truth, who will abide in you always.*

Today is what would be my father's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday; his father died at 52 so every day he lived after 52 was an amazement to my dad. We gave the flowers on the altar in thanksgiving for him and I asked for paler greeny blue ones - because my dad's eyes were that color and the thing I remember most clearly about him is the way he gazed out—compassionately but also as if trouble could be coming. Born in one war, then the depression, lost a baby sister and orphaned before he got out of high school, then young, young field doc in no time in the next war—his hair was as white as mine by the time he was thirty. As my brother says, you looked into his face and you saw all that, as well as irony and humor and curiosity and a kind of James Thurber-ian gentle despair. You could hear his angst, too, in his running commentary on the state of the world to his moody schnauzer, Toby. I do that, too, with Flash!

This is the kind of thing that happened to him on a regular basis. He and Toby were on a usual walk through the parking lot of the neighborhood Episcopal church and he sees his old Sewanee classmate, who was the rector of that church, in a car with a lady, but they both duck down. And so he thought well that's odd - I hope they are okay - and he and the ever-suspicious Toby head over toward the car to check on his friend and the lady and they poke their heads back up. And my father says hey how are you. And they say fine that they are looking for a contact lens on the floor of the car and he says oh gosh, well, can I help you? And they say no, no that's okay - you and Toby go on about your walk. And he and Toby did, and the next day Daddy hears that his friend had lit out for the territories with a Sunday school teacher! Yes! My father had quite the talent for the awkward encounter! And his sight - how he saw the world - was such a mix of guileless naiveté and stark, unflinching clarity that every encounter was an adventure! How do you see? My dad's sight was his gift and sometimes his wound and actually quite literally his job.

One way or the other we are all formed by the work we end up doing, and my dad and his partner were the first radiologists in Mississippi - so taking x-rays of patients and staring at walls of films like you see on tv shows and looking for the truth hidden in those shadowy grays and the grainy blacks and out-of-place whites and trying to figure out what was going on and not miss any detail or flinch or exaggerate and then passing on the truth he saw,

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in Dad's case, with legendary kindness. For both by the contours of his personhood and by the way medicine was shaped back then – he was connected to his patients. He talked with them about their films and their families and the weather; he rejoiced with the joyful; and he worried with the worried. His sight was his job and his way to live the spirit of truth – real and complex and kind.

Like many people nowadays but not so much then, the technology of his work galloped. General radiology became so many things— from xray to fluoroscopy, and angiography, computed tomography (that's ct's) and all kinds of nuclear medicine. As he aged, Dad's specialty became ultrasound and that gentle non-invasive technique was fitting. All along the way, he did his job best he could. He was into it and that matters. Not that you're bad and you are going to hell if you don't work hard– which would have been the outlook and the language of the faith he grew up with – but that you every day are being formed for eternity so every day it's big if you do and you be the most 'you' you can do and be. I heard this very insight from one of y'all this week by the way, – you said it to your fiancé – you be the most you you can be! That's all our jobs and every time we do our jobs, we transform the world. Really.

I think my dad bore a lot of burdens alone with a wry hopelessness. That stoicism was the way of his generation and of his gender and of his character. Be there for others but lone ranger your own needs. And I think church was sort of off to the side of his burdens though he was a faithful attender. He got the duty part and the give unto others part, but not the gift unto self part, the *Christ beneath us*, *Christ above us*, *Christ in quiet*, *Christ in danger* part. The “paraclete” part.

In the bible the word ‘paraclete’ is used for the Holy Spirit though only in this passage and one other which is too bad since the term really invigorates our vagueness about the Holy Spirit. Because paraclete means one who walks and talks and works along side you – as companion, as advocate,, literally “para’ beside you “clete’ calling - calling to you love and truth and keeping you company, lifting your spirits, giving you hope, companioning you. That's the job of the paraclete.—sometimes through speaking through some o other person and sometimes calling through the silence of your heart. And I have seen the Paraclete among you for thirty years. Just this week, this:

One of you had your house broken into this week while you were at out to dinner. The jerk left a handgun on your bed. So another of you sat up all night in the living room, keeping watch over, staying beside, giving comfort with your simple presence to one whose world had been violated. Paraclete.

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One of you was having a scary operation – brain surgery – when I went over to the hospital to pray with you before the surgery – we priests want to if you want us – I walked in the hospital entrance in the early morning light, and another of you showed up just then, too, and stayed with the family, until another one of you would arrive mid-morning. Typical saints, both lawyers. And lawyer is a synonym for Paraclete. Isn't that something?

I'm glad so many of you are paracletes for others; for in Christ that is your job. And in remembering my father, may I suggest here's to you welcoming some paracleting for yourself.- that's your job, too. To let some paracleting into your life. And here's to Daddy. I know in the eternal now he's not holding up the sky alone anymore. And here's to the Paraclete who is with him and who is beside you and me in this very hour.

Christ be with us, Christ within us,  
Christ behind us, Christ before us,  
Christ beside us, Christ to win us,  
Christ to comfort and restore us.

amen