

PNEUMA - THE COMFORT OF THE SPIRIT
A SERMON BASED ON JOHN 14:15-27
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2019
10:00 a.m.

My daughter put me on to a new Netflix series which I've just started.

It's getting quite good reviews and seems quite timely

as it is called 'The Politician'.

It follows the story of Payton Hobart

a very wealthy high school student

from Santa Barbara California who is in his senior year.

He has as his singular, life's focus

the goal of being president of the United States.

He has it all mapped out.

One of the steps leading him there is that he win

president of the student body.

I would say the show is a combination

of dark comedy, drama, social commentary and political satire.

It is House of Cards, meets Veep, meets Glee.

Everyone you meet is trying to be someone else.

And the worst criticism

you can hear characters on the show make of each other

is to be fake.

Dropping one's mask become the more powerful moments in the show.

Payton's opposition for president of the student body is River.

River is handsome, athletic and charismatic.

He is Payton's worst case scenario.

In a campaign debate, River makes a speech

that in some ways defines the series,

but also articulates a very real, no-masks truth

that we have all likely experienced at some point.

He gets asked by a moderator about removing the vending machines

with sugary drinks from the school.

He says,

"It's hardly the most pressing thing that any of us are dealing with.

The world is dark

and I think teenagers nowadays realize that,
and I don't know, it kind of feels like the world is ending,
so you know,
if a 42 ounce Mountain Dew makes you happy, I say go for it.

I keep thinking that uh, the only thing we all share together
is that we're all alone
and we take pictures and we post them
and we Facebook and Insta and Tweet and Snap
and everything and it just makes it worse.”

He then confesses to the school.

“I tried to kill myself last year.

It was about a year ago, I was feeling really depressed, not even
depressed, just hopeless because, um...

I felt so alone and I was uh,
afraid that I was always going to feel that way.

I went home after practice one day and I was working out at home
and something made me take a 45 pound plate

and uh.. I tied it to my ankle

and I went out to my pool and I jumped in the deep end.

And for a second I was really ready, I was really ready to die.

And then I, like, realized, I was like ‘River, what did you just do?’

And I panicked and I tried to get the rope off my ankle and I couldn’t.

And I just remember looking up at the surface of the water and thinking,

‘No one’s here man. You’re going to die alone.’

And next thing I remember I was floating at the surface.

There’s no like, cool ending to the story,

it’s just the rope untied itself from the weight.

I don’t know, I never did Boy Scouts.

No one was there.

I don’t want anyone here at this school to ever feel like that.

It’s really important to me that all of you know

that your lives have value

and that they’re important, that you’re important.”

Because it is raw and real in a school filled with fake,

it is a powerful truth telling moment in a show that is
about appearances and manipulating how one is seen.

It touches a pretty big nerve that we try not to touch.

Life can leave us feeling that we're alone.

That no one's there.

Grief, illness, anxiety and depression.

Sometimes even successes, the promotion, the windfall,

they are events that happen to us in unique ways

that effect us individually,

that while it might be the same event,

could have a different impact on us,

even within the same family.

The experiences are uniquely ours.

Ours alone.

Add to that the experience of feeling that we must mask our true selves,

and hide ourselves behind what we think family and friends

expect us to be,

it puts another barrier, another mask, in place.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book 'Life Together' points out
this can be true in the church community too.

He writes, "It may be that Christians,

notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer,
and all their fellowship in service,
may still be left to their loneliness.

The final break-through to fellowship does not occur,

because, though they have fellowship with one another
as believers and as devout people,
they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners.

The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner.

So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship.

We dare not be sinners.

Many Christians are unthinkably horrified
when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous.
So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy..."

No one was there.

In our Scripture lesson today,

Jesus was sitting with his disciples.

They had finished the last supper.

He told them he was leaving.

So it would seem that even Jesus wouldn't be there for them.

It's a feeling we've all had at times.

That even God has left us alone.

But that is not the kind of God we worship.

We do not worship a God who abandons us or leaves us.

We do not worship a God who walks away

leaving us to figure things out on our own.

Ours is a God of whom Scripture says,

“Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid or terrified for the Lord your God goes with you;

he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Ours is a God of whom Scripture says,
“For I am convinced that neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Our is a God who has directly said,
‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’

Yet here at the Table, Jesus told his disciples he was leaving.
Today he tells us how he will manage to leave the disciples,
and yet at the same time never leave us.

Jesus said,
“I will not leave you as orphans.
I will come to you.
I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate
to help you
and to be with you forever.”

The Spirit of Truth.

You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Before long, the world will not see me any more,

but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father,

and you are in me,

and I am in you.”

You are not alone.

You were never alone.

You will not be alone.

The New Testament is written in an ancient form of Greek.

If you speak more than one language,

you will know that sometimes there isn't an exact word

that you can use to translate into English.

Jesus said, I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate.

That word advocate, it's not exact.

It's an attempt to get close to the Greek.

Some translations will say Counsellor, or Helper.

The word in Greek is paraclete.

It means, one who is called alongside.

You are not alone.

The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit has been called alongside you.

To live with you and in you.

There have been times

I have felt overwhelmed with all that I had ahead of me.

When Mom passed away, it was sudden and unexpected.

She was out of province and I was far away.

Wendy and my brother came alongside me.

My aunts and uncles and cousins came alongside.

The church in her hometown came alongside.

This congregation came alongside and helped get me there.

Then,

feeling newly overwhelmed as executor
and facing the task of settling her and dad's estate
which were now conflated together,
professionals came alongside me,
guided me through the estate work.

That word, paraclete,

one who is called alongside, who comes alongside,
it is a powerful word.

Because it tells us and reminds us,

that we are not alone.

That God does not leave us nor forsake us.

In fact, just the opposite, he comes alongside us.

Jesus said I will ask the Father

and he will give you another advocate, counsellor
paraclete, one who is called alongside,
to be with you, forever.

And so we are not alone.

We are never alone.

Jesus said,

‘Peace I leave with you.

My peace I give to you.

I do not give to you in the way the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled,

and do not be afraid.

When you receive Christ,

the Spirit is with you, alongside you and in you.

You are not alone.

God himself, in the person of the Spirit

has come alongside you to help you and be with you.

Forever.

Be at peace.

Amen.