

Reading: John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

I will send an Advocate.

Open the Bible to us in a new and exciting way...

A very exciting thing happened to me this week. On Wednesday I ordered my first Uber. We were in Wellington for our daughter's graduation and I had had enough of shopping. To be fair, it only takes about 20 minutes for me to have had enough of shopping. So I did it. On my phone, I had, with the help of a young person, downloaded the app. But how can something you can't see, like the internet, make a real difference. Well it did. Through the intermediary of the app on my phone I was able to call up an Uber. It was marked by a wee car thingy on my phone. Within minutes a driver called Betty 20 was in her car just beside us. Even before Betty 20 knew it, she was to be our Uber driver. Betty 20 didn't realise what a big moment this was for me. She hardly said a word, in fact I don't think I spoke her language. But the car was, well - uber clean, and we sped to our destination. I thanked Betty 20 and that unseen force we call the internet. The app asked me if I had had a good ride. I gave Betty 20 a 5 star review.

How can an unseen force in our lives make a real difference? That's the question many of us come with this Pentecost Sunday.

In today's Gospel reading - the one we read from the middle of the church and stand to listen too because we believe we hear Jesus speaking to us through it. In that reading Jesus is making his farewells to the disciples. Jesus has been with the disciples to guide them, to encourage them, to heal, them to teach them, to eat with them, to grow in friendship with them. But soon he knows he must die and can no longer be with them. But he doesn't want to leave them unencouraged, unguided, untaught, and without his friendship. So he makes them a promise that he will ask the Father to send an advocate to be with them forever.

Unseen, this advocate will come. Unseen, he will make a real difference. Unseen, he will enable Jesus to be a friend coming alongside us.

A friend coming alongside is just what one the Wellington High School student needed.

The class had a trip to the movies and one boy thought it would be cool to mix what they call rocket fuel from the drinks cabinet of mum and dad. He put it in his drink bottle and the teachers were unsuspecting. He offered it to a girl in the class and after a while of drinking this rocket fuel she went off to the loo. Another student was concerned that she hadn't returned for a long while so she went out and called out to her in the women's loos. "Are you alright?" All she got back was a whole lot of gibberish. Eventually even that stopped. She slid under the door to find her classmate slumped over the toilet. She opened her eye lid to see her eye roll back in her head. This was the classic sign she had gone into a coma or worse. Quickly she phoned the ambulance and help came. By coming alongside she had undoubtedly saved the girl's life.

Today, on Pentecost, we celebrate the friend who comes alongside as the Holy Spirit. Pentecost, pent means fifty and Pentecost is exactly fifty days after Easter day. It is often called the birthday of the church because the downcast fearful disciples are given new life and all the languages of the world. The words of Ezekiel have come true, the dry bones now have life. The advocate comes, he comes alongside, but he also can be found within us.

The Spirit is the one who bubbles up within us to give us joy. The Spirit is the one who nudges us to do good. The Spirit is the one who gives us the words when all else fails. The Spirit is the in-between one who enables us to have a friendship with Jesus even though he is no longer with us.

At the ascension Jesus was taken physically beyond the sight of the disciples. But now, through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is able to be with us always. He is no longer limited by time or space.

A powerful thing happens when we open ourselves to the Spirit. The more we have the Spirit in our lives supporting us and guiding us, the more we find that we can be a support and an advocate for other people.

I don't know if you have ever been part of family group conference. I have, many times. A family group conference is called to support and encourage families that are having difficulty. When a young person is involved, an advocate is appointed for them. The advocate is there to put the young person's side, to keep their end up in the negotiations and to guide them through the process. My family dread me going to family group conferences because I usually end up with a troubled teenager to look after. They look around the room. Who is someone who can take this person in?

I wonder who you advocate for? I wonder who you get alongside. This week Christians around the world in over 82 countries are joining the Archbishop of Canterbury in praying. The challenge can be found online, but essentially it is to pray for five other people, to be an advocate before God for them. It may be someone you're close to, someone at church, or someone in the community. Why not ask the Spirit to guide you in choosing the right people for you to pray for, for just one week. The Holy Spirit is always calling us beyond ourselves to be on the lookout for those that need our care. Although unseen he can bring us home to God, just as surely as Betty 20 and my Uber app brought me home.

Let us pray:  
Holy Spirit it is so reassuring to hear of your presence in my life. Come be the advocate in my heart. Draw me closer to my friend Jesus in all that I do. Hold me tight and never let me stray. Amen.