

## Sermon 17 May 2026

### Galatians 6:1-5 John 14:15-21

Next week we observe Pentecost Sunday in our Christian calendar, which is a celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today's reading is something of a preview of Pentecost because Jesus promises us that he will never leave us, that he will always live in us in the form of the Holy Spirit. *'Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. You will know that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.'* John 14:19. What does that mean for us? How will we reflect that?

It is interesting that the Greek word used here is *parakletos*. It is interesting because it is a word that is very difficult to translate. For that reason, different versions of the Bible use different words translating *parakletos*. Today's version uses the word 'advocate.' An advocate is someone who speaks up for you, who takes your side. Some versions use the word 'helper', which is kind of self-explanatory. Other words used are 'counsellor' and 'comforter', both conveying the sense of support, especially in times of distress and need.

The first point I want to make is that I believe God's Spirit is present in everyone, it's just that not everyone acknowledges that presence, not everyone opens themselves to that presence. I think what is apparent is that when we open ourselves to God's Spirit, we become equipped to do God's work, to do Christ's work in our world. I quote from our first reading, *'Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.'* Galatians 6:2.

On more than one occasion, I have given a definition of God as 'The spirit of love working in people, through people.' When we talk to God, when we pray to God, we open ourselves to his Spirit and we become empowered to spread around his love. I don't need to tell you, there is so much need for God's love out there. Albert Schweitzer once said, *'Wherever one turns, one can find someone who needs you.'* If we have the right attitude, we can make a difference in other people's lives. A quote attributed to Buddha goes, *'Thousands of candles can be lit from one candle. Kindness never decreases by being shared.'* I want to share a story with you, a true story.

In Brooklyn, New York, Chush is a school that caters for children with learning difficulties. At a fundraising dinner, the father of a boy at Chush delivered a speech that would never be forgotten. After praising the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, 'Where is the perfection in my son, Jerry? Everything God does is done with perfection, but my child cannot understand things in the same way other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?'

The audience were quite taken aback and felt a little uncomfortable. The father answered his own question by saying, 'I believe that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people respond to this child.' He then told the following story.

One afternoon, Jerry and his dad walked past a park where some boys Jerry knew were playing baseball. Jerry asked, 'Dad, do you think they will let me play?' Jerry's dad knew that in reality most of the boys would not want him in their team. However, he approached one of the boys in the outer field and asked if he could play. The boy looked for guidance from his teammates but getting none, took the matter into his own hands. 'We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth innings. I guess he can be in our team and we'll try to put him to bat in the ninth innings.'

Jerry's father was thrilled and Jerry smiled broadly. Surprisingly, Jerry's team made up the deficit and at the bottom of the ninth innings they had drawn level. All the bases were full and Jerry was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Jerry bat and so give away their chance to win the game?

Much to his father's surprise, Jerry was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Jerry didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit the ball with it. However, as Jerry stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps closer and lobbed the ball gently so Jerry should at least be able to make contact. Jerry swung clumsily and missed. One of his teammates came up to Jerry and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher. The pitcher again took a few steps closer and gently lobbed the ball.

Jerry and his teammate swung the bat and made contact. However, the ball just rolled back to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the ball and could easily have thrown the ball to first base. Jerry would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher threw the ball way over the head of first base.

Everyone started yelling, 'Jerry, run to first base. Run! Run! Never in his life had Jerry run so fast. He scampered to first base. The fielder now had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to second base and Jerry would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher threw the ball high and far over the heads of both second and third basemen into the outfield. Everyone yelled, 'Run to second! Run to second!'

As Jerry reached second base, the baseman turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, 'Run to third!' As Jerry rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him, urging him, 'Run, Jerry, run!' Jerry ran home and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and claimed him the hero, as he had just hit a grand slam and won the game for his team.

'That day,' his father said softly, tears now running down his face, 'those boys reached God's perfection.'

So what does this story mean for us? Where do we fit into this story? Well, simply this. Jerry is the face of those who right now are feeling lonely, who perhaps are feeling a little stressed, who perhaps are worried, or just a little down. There are just so many feeling that way. I repeat Albert Schweitzer's quote, '*Wherever one turns, one can find someone who needs you.*' There are many experiencing those emotions who are seated among us here, let alone out there. Some we know, some will be strangers. It doesn't matter. We are imperfect but we can reflect something of God's perfection in the way we reach out, the way we communicate with others. A phone call, a compliment, even a smile can give someone a lift.

Amy Neumann, author and keynote speaker, said, '*Smile at a stranger and make two people happy.*' Now, that is interesting, and that is the note I want to finish on. You see, when we make a gesture of this nature, we actually feel good ourselves. The Dalai Lama said, '*If you want others to be happy, practise compassion. If you want to be happy, practise compassion.*'

We could do worse than make a vow at the beginning of each day to make one phone call and give two compliments. You will be surprised at what a difference you will make, not only in the lives of others, but also in yours.