The Radical Revision of Our Image of God  KJW 6.11.17

Weird associations that affect our view of God...My grandmother had blue tint that older women of her generation used to keep white hair from yellowing. Tricky tint to get right: too little and you don’t get brightening effect, too much and you get a blue hue. G-ma had overdone it when I was visiting. She was hanging clothes on the line when a Blue Jay dive-bombed that blue hair. I’ll never forget her startled scream and Grandma dance.

Only physical form Sprit takes in NT is an alighting bird. For some reason can’t get Blue Jay dive-bombing grandma’s coif out of head

Then there’s the new name that Jesus, in the gospel of John, gave to the Holy Spirit: Greek word, Paraclete.

Which sounds a lot like Parakeet, member of parrot family: talking-squawking birds...come with warning the pet shop: they have been known to attack little kids with their sharp beaks.

Easy for our image of God to be closer to Parakeet—squawking bird that might turn on you—than the Named-by-Jesus Paraclete.

Paraclete in Gk. is translated various ways. Primary: Advocate (advocate for the defense against accusation). Evokes Hebrew term for evil, “ha satan” the satan, accuser (ha satan is not a proper name—tho sometimes personified; an office or a function)

At core of Hebrew experience of evil: accusation. Paraclete is anti-accusation serum. Other translation is Consoler-Comforter.

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...” All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
(John 14: 15-18, 25-26)

By naming the Spirit “Paraclete” Jesus is saying the Divine Spirit, God’s Spirit, is one sent to bind-heal the wounds of accusation. This amounts to a massive revision of our vision of God!

The wounds of accusation are universal. A few scenarios:

You’re a mom with a teenage autistic son. You get stink eye in Kroger when your son makes different sounds/gestures interpreted as threatening to those around. Stink eye says: What’s wrong with your son? What’s wrong with you as a parent?

I was laid off from Teamsters job in 1971 recession...had to apply food stamps for my young family. Process was demeaning. Made to feel it’s your fault you need food stamps and already you’re beating yourself up for needing food stamps.

Since we fear misfortune, tend to regard it as a character defect. Who’s the congressman who literally said: “if we get the sick out of the insurance pools then people who have done things right, are healthy won’t be penalized.”

Julia was Choir Director at St. Clare when lost their priest in a traumatic way. Interim priest was threatened by Julia because she was beloved and had a lot of influence in parish. On her last Sunday this priest actually quoted text “If you forgive sins of any they are forgiven if you retain they are retained” and said, “I’m retaining your sins, shaking the dust off my feet as I leave you today.” Over next year some parishioners Julia had been close to but who had distanced themselves from her, came back to her and said, “This interim told me horrible things about you.” When Julia mentions that experience today, you can feel how much it hurt.

If you ever lived with a hyper critical parent/boss you know what accusation in form of unrelenting criticism does to your spirit.

If you had an abusive spouse, or a messy divorce, you have suffered under the influence of accusation.

Accusation is at work in every form of abuse.

The abuser always uses accusation to control.

When a woman is called pushy-obnoxious at work for speaking up forcefully at a meeting (a trait celebrated in men) it’s a form of control by accusation. Every oppressed group is subject to accusations from the oppressing group as a form of control.
Accusation is everywhere human beings are found. Remember: In Hebrew thought, it’s at core of the spiritual mystery of evil. Accusation is what puts the creep in creepy.

What are the wounds of accusation?
--loss of reputation (with all it’s ramifications)
--loss of friendship/community
--internalization (we internalize the voices of accusation)
--hyper self-scrutiny (having to perform above the accusations)

Accusation is a gift that keeps on giving: when accusations are circulating about you, they are often whispered. If you speak up in defense of yourself, you may look even more guilty. At the least you suffer a social penalty for objecting. We just don’t like it when people get angry and hurt and defensive. (Unpleasant parts of Paul’s letters when he’s defending himself against accusation. Same in gospel of John when Jesus is doing same.)

Jesus was subjected to wide-ranging accusation.

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at this glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and of sinners!’” (Mt. 11:18–19)

He was under a cloud of suspicion about gender-sexuality issues:

He was an unmarried rabbi, which made him suspect (why wasn’t he married?) When he talked with woman at well alone he was breaking gender-sexuality norms. He bore the stigma of Mamzer status—term for bastard in Hebrew, shameful in that society. His mother regarded as a sexually loose woman because Joseph wasn’t father of Jesus. and that reflected on Jesus. A leader hosted a public dinner for Jesus and was scandalized when a woman bathed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair (viewed as an act of sexual intimacy). The leader objected when Jesus wouldn’t object. All this was a cloud of accusation-suspicion over explosive issues of gender and sexuality.

Jesus was accused of law-breaking, especially breaking Sabbath, the signal command that separated Jews from pagans.

Accused of lacking proper credentials: he was from Galilee, never received formal training as a rabbi from recognized master rabbis.
Accused of the **greatest taboo in his religious culture**: blasphemy

What **got him crucified** was accusation regarding the **greatest taboo in Roman culture**: the crime of sedition/rebellion.

**Last thing about accusation.** We foist it on others thru unconscious mechanism called **projection** (a big part of scapegoating.)

Projection is when you see something in others that consciously or more often unconscious bothers you about yourself. Someone who lies a lot will call other people liars more frequently.

It’s an **unconscious mechanism, often a defense mechanism against our own internal voice of accusation**.

Saw **Visa commercial** featuring two hipster entrepreneurs in their start up offices with glass walls. Tall-handsome guy stops by office of his buddy and says, “They are playing Saturday night!” Buddy answers, “Where?” He replies, “San Francisco” Buddy says, “We gotta go!” Visa gets them on plane, cab drops them at gritty club where their band is playing...

My reaction was strong—especially given that it was commercial: **Who does that? That is so gross! What upper class BS!**

Then I just had to laugh at myself: **U2 Tickets story.**

I was projecting accusation at these guys in the commercial but all the energy was generated by my unconscious self-criticism.
That accusation voice was gnawing at me, so I threw it at them.

**Why would Jesus want the disciples to know the Spirit coming their way would a Paraclete/Defender of the Accused?**

Because he was experiencing God in this way and he knew they needed to experience God in this way too.

He was by his death, unmasking the scapegoat mechanism which depends on accusation.
Remember Jesus talked about the power of ha satan a lot. He saw accusation as the mystery of evil afflicting humans.

The Spirit Jesus named Paraclete is sent to interrupt this vicious cycle in our relationships...and to radically revise our default vision of God, one might even say our religious vision of God.

In an epic resurrection appearances in John Jesus breathes on the fearful disciples, cowering behind closed doors, and says “receive the Holy Spirit” Let’s use this for our time of meditation.

The image there is breath. For our meditation, I’ll to shift the image to water. In John 7 Jesus used this as a metaphor for the Spirit he would send: “Whoever comes to me, out of their heart will flow rivers of living water. He said this about the Spirit...”

If you will, picture your heart under the effects of accusation in it’s many and varied forms as a piece of parched land. Any picture of parched land will do—clay, parched dirt, a dirt road, a patch of drought-scorched grass....

If you’ve ever actually watered parched ground, you know that it has to be done gently-progressively. You don’t start by pouring a huge amount of water—it just rolls off the hard surface.

You start with a mist to gently soften the surface...then increase the amount of water as the ground becomes a little moist and thus more receptive...stick with that kind of image.

I’m going to offer three levels of receiving Spirit using this image. t. You are free to move through all three, or stay parked at any one of the levels.

Briefly, first level of receiving Spirit is entertaining thought, “Maybe God is a defender against accusation rather than a purveyor of accusation.” Second level is to imagine what it might feel like if your realized this was the situation. Third level picture a community that was being intentional about letting go of accusation in favor of this Paraclete-effect.

OK. Let’s relax, focus on your breathing. Take some time to form an image of parched land representing your heart under influence of accusation. Literally just focus on what that might look like.
1. Receive the Spirit on the parched land of your heart by entertaining the thought: “What if God really wants to be my defender against accusation and not my accuser?” Picture that thought as a gentle mist falling on parched ground of your heart. Gentle as the morning dew. Go with that. If it’s helpful free to stay with it the whole time.

2. Receive the Spirit on the parched ground of your heart by imagining what feelings would accompany you if you were to accept this revised vision of God. You could picture that mist turning into gentle rainfall.

3. Receive the Spirit on the parched ground of your heart by imagining a community that is recentering from accusation as a control mechanism to an intentional embrace of Paraclete.

You might picture that as a good soaking rain on that land and broaden maybe the extent of that land.