

Strange Companion
Easter 7
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Trinity Bixby
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[John 14: 15-21 \(CEB\)](#)

[Acts 17:18-28 \(NLT\)](#)

[1 Peter 3:13-17 \(NLT\)](#)

A world in peril. Fellowship. Companions. Good and Evil. Redemption for those suffering on their way to fulfil a monumental task. Given the context, of hearing me in a church, you're probably thinking of various Bible passages – and you're right. But those of you thinking that I'm also describing the plot of half a dozen books and movies – you're also right. What would Star Wars be without the companionship of Han and Chewbacca? Or Ocean's Eleven, if they were but Ocean Alone? Doctor Who even explicitly calls its unlikely teammate (to the nearly immortal Doctor) the "Companion." In the beginning of the Lord of the Rings epic by Tolkien, there's the famous scene of members of the fantasy races – Human, Elf, Dwarf, Hobbit, Wizard and so on – joining together in the Fellowship of the Ring. Tasked with carrying the One Ring to an active volcano in order to destroy it, the small-in-stature Frodo Baggins is not looking forward to going alone. Fortunately, his compatriots speak up, one after another – "You have my sword – and my bow – and my axe!" It's a powerful scene, no matter how many times we see it or read it, which is why, I think, it keeps appearing in one place or another. Marvel has even made an entire movie series about unlikely team-ups, and strange companions linked in common cause – usually putting aside their differences to face great challenges. (That's the Avengers and about 17 other movies).

The idea of unlikely companions is ancient – in one of the earliest pieces of writing, from ancient Sumer, we hear the story of King Gilgamesh and his battle with the wild-man Enkidu – who become best friends, roaming the world having adventures while they seek the secret of immortality. Why does this image appear over and over again? It may have something to do with what it means to be human. To be human is to desire companionship – not necessarily constant

companionship, for we all need time to ourselves, too – but knowing that there are others with you can help you face even the toughest of challenges.

And so, my friends – this is the greatest news ever. Because you ALWAYS have a companion. Not just any companion – the best advocate, the best listener, the best comfort – the one who created all that is. When Jesus was preparing for the ascension, he told the disciples that God “will send another Companion who will be with you forever... Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you.”

Your great companion is God. In those times that you feel alone, hold fast to your companion. The Spirit is always with you – and you are always with God. It's a simple statement, but becomes more and more powerful the more you think of it. Even John's word for this Companion, this Advocate is beautiful – *Paracletos*, one who is called alongside. Paracletos – your Companion – called alongside you. Paracletos – your advocate, who stands at your side and argues on your behalf.

It's a beautiful concept, that we are never without company in time of need. Your Companion is also my Companion – and also their Companion. In a way, we are linked to each and every other person through the Companion. You remember the popular game of “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” – where you try to connect actors together by movies they've shared with others, until you find the closest link to Kevin Bacon (Or really, any other actor)? Well, there's only two degrees of separation in the Spirit. You are connected to the Paraclete, who is connected to me. And it's the same for everyone the world over. Meet someone for the first time? Connected. A close friend has a new baby? You're the same level of connected with their child as you are with them. And it holds true across time, too – you are as connected with Abraham as you are with Abraham Lincoln. With your Uncle George as you are with St. George, George Washington, and Doctor Jorge Gonzales.

The flip-side of this is also true: just as God is your companion, so you are God's companion. A strange companion, to be certain – for there is no one else exactly like you. And there never has been. You are fearfully and wonderfully

made, as Psalm 139 puts it. God, who made you, was there in your childhood, your teenage years, and your adulthood - and yes, even when you have gained the “Crown of Wisdom”, God is there with you, calling to you, saying “I love you, my strange and wonderful companion. Show my love to the world. See, there is another of my strange and wonderful companions! Can you see how I love them? Can you see how they love me?”

That’s what Paul was doing in Athens – showing God’s love, telling God’s story, and helping to connect them to God and each other. If you’re not familiar with the story from Acts 17, Paul shows up in Athens, telling people the good news of Jesus and the Resurrection. Only, some of the folks there think that Paul is preaching about two “foreign gods” – one named Yeshua, and the other Anastasia. So, he’s invited to appear before the Areopagus, the high council, and explain what he’s talking about – and Paul leaps at the opportunity. Rather than dismiss them as having no idea of God, Paul points out how God has already been active among them – showing that they have already been worshipping God. “This God... is the [One] who made the world and everything in it.... [God] gives life and breath to everything and [God] satisfies every need...for in [God] we live and move and exist.” Part of the genius of this message is that Paul uses their own poets – their own language and way of seeing the world – to help them understand God’s action in their lives. “As some of your own poets have said, “We are [God’s] children.” That’s pretty impressive for someone who hasn’t spent much time in the city!

I think that this is part of why we value stories of companions so highly – it touches something of our connection with God. When we tell stories of unlikely companions – in history as well as in fiction – we recognize God’s action in our lives, and feel like we are a companion of the characters, too. And this is one of the great things about the Bible – we connect with the stories of God, and how people have seen their walk with God throughout centuries. Luke’s story of Paul preaching to the Athenians becomes part of our story – through these words, we see how the great Companion was revealing Godself to the world.

Paul’s speech to the Athenians is short – only about thirteen sentences in English. If you were called on to summarize your faith in thirteen sentences,

could you do it? I know that I am grateful for those who have summarized faith in poetic form – that there’s something special about hearing statements of faith from people you love and trust. For instance, my great-grandfather Charles John wrote a lot of poem-prayers that I learned as a child, though I never met him. One was so important to me that in high school, I set it to music:

*Stars that shine above
Tell of God’s Love
For even when clouds hide,
Still they are there!
So we, dear Father,
Though shadows hide thee,
Know thou art keeping watch
With tenderest care.*

Since then, I’ve written my own statement of faith – multiple times, in fact, as it’s a requirement several times over in the ordination and call process of the Presbyterian Church (USA). I highly encourage you to write or re-write your statement of what it is to be God’s strange and wonderful companion. Try it out – take some time in prayer and contemplation, feel how the great Companion is with you, and try to put it into words. As Peter tells us, “If someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it, but do this in a gentle and respectful way.”

You see, my friends, when you live out your faith – when you are listening for God’s call, and leaning into being God’s companion – you are leaning into what it means to be human. To see love in everyone you meet. To know that you are connected with everyone who has ever been, and ever will be – through God, your companion, comfort, and counselor.

Amen.