

Who is the Holy Spirit?

John 14:15-21

May 14, 2023

In our worship service this morning, we mentioned the Holy Spirit multiple times. Ever since I had an encounter with Christ at age 17, I wondered about the Holy Spirit. I didn't understand who or what the Holy Spirit is or was. As a young Christian, I focused heavily on speaking in tongues and feeling guilty when I did not speak in tongues. As a result of that narrow focus, I missed the wholeness of who the Holy Spirit is.

It was not a sudden realization, but over time I began to understand the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit works in our lives today. It seems appropriate on this Mother's Day to talk about the Holy Spirit, because in the Old Testament, the word "spirit" is feminine. Therefore, many people feel the Holy Spirit is the feminine side of God.

In our scripture passage this morning, Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples and preparing them for his departure. He tells them about the Holy Spirit. Before we read, let us pray.

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read John 15:15-21

"If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷the 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. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three are in this scripture passage. We know the Father, who is God. We know, Jesus, who is the Son, but who is the Holy Spirit? In this group of three, or the Trinity, many people call the Holy Spirit the shy one. And perhaps the Holy Spirit is called the shy one because we don't talk about the Spirit very much.

The Holy Spirit shows up from time to time in the Old Testament. One of my favorite stories takes place when the Israelites are wandering around in the wilderness. God gives instructions for the people to build a tabernacle, a portable temple, a place where God is said to reside. When the people saw this tabernacle, they knew God was with them. It represented the presence of God.

God give Moses instructions on how to build the tabernacle. 13 chapters in the book of Exodus cover these instructions – 1/3 of the book of exodus. I can imagine Moses getting quite overwhelmed at the task. Have you been overwhelmed by instructions? When I bought my new car, I was given this manual. It's still sits on my desk at home waiting for me to open it up but it looks too overwhelming.

So God says this to Moses: "I have chosen Bezalel, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts, to make artistic designs for work and gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab to help him. Also, I have given skill to all the craftsman to make everything I have commanded you."

In other words, God has given these chosen people the ability to make the tabernacle by placing the spirit of God upon them.

In another place in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God comes upon Sampson to give him strength to fight his enemies. In other words in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit comes upon a particular person at a particular time for a particular task.

Even in the Gospels, the Spirit comes upon Jesus and leads him into the wilderness before he begins his ministry.

But here, in our scripture passage, Jesus changes everything (as Jesus tends to do).

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples, even though they don't understand it at this point. They have been with Jesus for three years. They have never done ministry without him. They have not been alone. The very physicality of Jesus has been their source of reassurance. But now Jesus is talking about leaving them. It's so unthinkable that they cannot fathom it.

I will still be with you, Jesus says, but the nature of my presence will change. I will place my spirit *within* you. You will not be alone. I will not leave you as orphans. The world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I will be present with you in the form of the Holy Spirit. I will still encourage you, work with you, pray for you, teach you, use you. You will not be alone because I am sending you another Advocate.

Instead of the Holy Spirit coming upon a particular person for a particular task at a particular time, the Holy Spirit will now be in you always.

The word is Paraclete. Paraclete is not a small green or yellow bird. Paracletes are not those things on the bottom of football and baseball shoes. Paraclete is our advocate. Other translations of the Bible use these words: the Paraclete is your comforter, helper, counselor, friend. You will not to be alone as you follow me, Jesus says, because my Spirit will be in you.

Everyone who follows Jesus has the Holy Spirit or Jesus' spirit within them.

Five weeks ago, we celebrated the resurrection. This passage says that the presence and power of Jesus goes beyond the empty tomb. There is life beyond Easter Sunday, and it has everything to do with the Spirit.

Dwell on this story: we believe in the incarnation, that is, God took on flesh to be with us in Jesus. Jesus showed us how much God loves us, and how far God is willing to go to show us that love. Yet, there is more to the story. God raised Jesus from the dead to show us that nothing can separate us from God's love, not even death, and nothing will keep God from loving us and redeeming the whole world. For God so loved the whole world that he gave his only son.

Yet there's more to the story. God continues to come to us in the Holy Spirit to encourage us, to look out for us, care for us, stay with us, walk alongside us. God comes to us in the Holy Spirit to be our advocate, our friend, our counselor, our comforter, our helper. This is the Christian life beyond the empty tomb.

A long time ago, I remember, being in a Bible study that asked this question: As a follower of Jesus, would you rather live in Jesus' time or now? Think about that question for a few moments. When I first heard the question, I thought about it.

I thought how wonderful it would be if I could see what Jesus looked like, to hear his voice, to hear him teach, to watch him heal people, to see him laugh and smile, perhaps look me in the eye.

Yet, Jesus was in so much demand that I would get very little of him. I would have to share him with a lot of people.

The Bible teaches that all followers of Christ have Jesus, His spirit, the Holy Spirit, within them. Therefore, Jesus is with us always, always there to hear us, always here to teach us, always here to comfort us, always here to encourage us. My answer to that question would I rather live in Jesus's time or right now? I would rather live now, because I can have Jesus all the time through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit not only Advocate, but the Spirit of Truth. It is the Spirit who reminds us of our identity as children of God. It is the Spirit who enables us to recognize the voice of our Shepherd. It is the Spirit who encourages us at times when we are stressed or frightened.

It is the Spirit who comes along side as an advocate in the face of all the challenges and news of the world. It is the Spirit that reminds us of Jesus' promise to be with us and for us. It is the Spirit that helps us believe that we have worth in the eyes of God. It is the Spirit that gives us the ability to not just to survive the challenges in our life but also flourish in them. It is the Spirit that gives us courage to talk about Jesus. We have not been left as orphans.

One thing that is interesting about our passage today is that it begins and ends with love. This teaching on the Holy Spirit is surrounded by love. We show our love for God by following the commands of Jesus which involves living a life of love. As we are shown help and guidance and counseling and teaching by the Holy Spirit, we extend the same to others.

We are to be paracletes by coming alongside one another.

For example, isn't a Stephen Minister a Paraclete as they come alongside others to listen and be a presence? Those of you who bring extended communion to the homebound are paracletes.

How many of you have sat at the bedside of our members who have been ill, or help them with anything they need? I, along with several others from our congregation, having been sitting by the bedside of one of our members who is dying. We have been Paracletes, representing the spirit of God with our presence and comfort and help. Being an advocate is not new, because what we are doing is continuing the work of Jesus.

I draw your attention to the song we sang after confession. The song is called *Spirit of the Living God*. Look at the words again with me:

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living, God fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

This is our prayer.

Melt me: work within me to be more loving.

Mold me: into the person you created me to be.

Fill me: with your love, compassion, courage and wisdom.

Use me: to continue your ministry of love in the world.

All by the Holy Spirit working in us.

I end with a prayer by St Augustine...

“Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.”

Augustine

Amen.

Advoc

ate