

# Pastor's Message



Scripture Reading: John 14:25-26 New Revised Standard Version

Jesus says "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." John 14:25-26

## Sermon: I Believe in the Holy Spirit

Well, this is a bit spooky. In my 30 years of ordained ministry, I've never preached a sermon without company. I'm missing your faces. I miss the joys and concerns we share and the prayers we say over them. I miss that feeling we get when we're together in worship, that somehow we become something bigger, more than the sum of our parts, because God is with us when we gather.

But for a time, we are no longer worshipping together because of something spookier still: the Corona Virus. And so, at the end of the week, I'll continue to send sermons via email and on our website until it's safe to worship together again.

During this Lent, we're in a sermon series on the Apostle's Creed and we've come to that place where it says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." That's it. That's all the creed says, unless you look up in the previous section about Jesus Christ where it says Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Spirit." But still, there's just not a lot to go on here in the creed. The Holy Spirit sounds a bit spooky to a lot of people. The King James version calls it the Holy Ghost, and that's spookier still. So, who is the Holy Spirit?

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit becomes clearer as the revelation of God unfolds. The Old Testament is full of references about God's spirit or the Holy Spirit. Right on the first page of the Bible, in the creation story, we see the Holy Spirit who broods over chaos and this Spirit creates order and creation out of chaos. But throughout the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is kind of hit and miss. The Holy Spirit comes to particular men and women, at a particular time, to empower them to accomplish a particular task.

Turning to the New Testament, the first four books are called the Gospels. They tell the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, each in their own way. God's

spirit or the Holy Spirit acts in much the same way as you find him in the Old Testament. It is sent and it acts – in particular circumstances, in particular people's lives. The Holy Spirit shows up in the very first story in the New Testament, at Jesus' birth. And he was there at Jesus' baptism, descending on him like a dove, there when Jesus leaves the Jordan River to face his temptation in the wilderness. Jesus begins his earthly ministry of teaching and healing by unrolling the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reading. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free." Luke 4:18

Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit on numerous occasions. Jesus promises to the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come to them and to those who love him when he is gone. He promises that the Holy Spirit will help them and be with them forever and he will live with them and be in them.

But it's when we leave the Gospels and turn to the next book, the book of Acts (which is the story of what happened after Jesus ascended into heaven) that we see, quite literally, an explosion of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts starts out on Pentecost, the day of the giving of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and those who heard and believed in Jesus Christ. And a sea change occurs. No longer is the Holy Spirit given to one particular person, at one particular time, for one particular purpose but now it is given to all believers, to empower them to live radically different lives – free, liberated, empowered lives. Throughout the rest of the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, we begin to see what that looks like. These followers of Jesus are brave, confident, fearless, able to face incredible adversity, filled with joy. And they change the world.

Jesus promised them this would happen. In the Gospel of John, beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter, we have what's called the farewell address. Jesus is telling them that he has to go away and he says, in effect, "It's better for you if I go away. I will send another comforter, whose presence will be with you. As long as I'm here in this one body, in this one place, at this one time, there's only so much I can do. But if I go, the Holy Spirit will come to you, and I will not just be with you, but IN you. I'll never leave you alone. I will not leave you orphaned. I will send you the Holy Spirit and the power of God will rest upon you."

You see, the coming of the Spirit after Jesus' resurrection is also the coming of the Son and the Father to live within his people. Of all the religions in the world, the particular gift of Christians (that which is particular to us) is the Holy Spirit that is given to all of us as the permanent, active, dynamic presence of God in Christ within us and among us. When we say, in the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit", part of what we're saying is that we trust this particular gift of Christians: that the whole enchilada, the fullness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is with us always, closer to us than our own breath.

We need to remember that right now. We need to remember that it's not only when we gather in worship that God's presence can be felt. But that no matter where we are, no matter what we are facing, no matter the danger, the fear, the uncertainty, we are not alone for God is with us.

Trust that. Hold on to that during these days. Remember, this too shall pass. I pray for you strength and courage. And I close with these words from Pope Francis:

"Tonight before falling asleep  
think about when we will return to the street.

When we hug again,  
when all the shopping together will seem like a party.

Let's think about when the coffees will return to the bar,  
the small talk, the photos close to each other.

We think about when it will be all a memory  
but normality will seem an unexpected and beautiful gift.

We will love everything that has so far seemed futile to us.  
Every second will be precious.

Swims at the sea, the sun until late, sunsets, toasts, laughter.  
We will go back to laughing together."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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