

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

John 14:8-17, 25-27

First Presbyterian Church of Georgetown, Texas

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⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

²⁵"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But 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.

²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Jesus says: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." ...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."

These words are found in what we call the farewell discourse of Jesus in John 14-16. These are Jesus' final promises and guidance to his disciples as he is about to depart this earth.

Crystallized in these chapters is Jesus' final body of instruction for disciples who feel alone, afraid and anxious. Several promises of the coming Holy Spirit are given and those promises find fulfillment on the day of Pentecost.

In the early centuries of the church, the day of Pentecost was a significant day, second in importance only to Easter and more significant than Christmas Day. Originally of course, Pentecost was a Jewish festival, the feast of weeks. It was also called the feast of first fruits, commemorating the end of the barley harvest and the first of the wheat harvest. Pentecost was 50 days following the first Sunday after Passover. It was perceived as the completion of God's

great act of redemption that began with the Passover and the exodus. In later Judaism and today, Pentecost marks the anniversary of God giving the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Deuteronomy 16 describes the great festivals in ancient Israel: the feast of tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost. On these three festivals Jews would come from all over the Mediterranean world to Jerusalem. Just as pilgrims overpopulated the city during the Passover week when Jesus died, so too would a great number from all over be there for this festival of Pentecost.

Following Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to the disciples for 40 days. During that time he gave them many promises about the future presence of the Spirit. After Jesus' ascension, for ten days they waited. Acts 1:15 says that there were about 120 people gathered together waiting, not just 11 but 120. While they were together on the day of Pentecost, something happened which would transform this day from a harvest festival to a day of the Holy Spirit.

"Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them."

The language of analogy is used here- like the rush of a mighty wind, tongues as of fire. The wind is a symbol of the life-giving Spirit of God. The fire too is a symbol of the refining power of the Spirit. The color of red the church wears on this day reminds us of the fire of the Spirit present on that significant day.

The apostle Peter interprets what has happened by declaring that this is a fulfillment of a prophesy of Joel: *"In the last days... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."*

This is not the first time that God's people encountered the Spirit but something is certainly unique here. The Spirit of God was active in the creation. The Spirit anointed prophets, priests and kings with power. Jesus and John the Baptist were filled with the Spirit from the time of their birth.

So why is there the need now in Acts 2 for the Spirit to come? For that matter, why do we need the Spirit? Why is Pentecost important?

What happens on Pentecost completes the work of Christ's redemption. We normally think of Christ's work being accomplished on Easter, after the resurrection. But this is not the way the church through time has thought of Christ's work. It is notable that Jesus doesn't exit the earth on Easter day. It's not over yet. He sticks around for awhile. Acts 1:2-3 tells us that he spent 40 days following his resurrection giving instructions to his disciples, *"presenting himself*

alive by many convincing proofs, appearing to them for forty days, and speaking about the kingdom of God."

After forty days, he ascended to heaven. Then ten days later on Pentecost, the Spirit that Jesus promised to the disciples at the last supper descended on them. Just as the Jews saw Pentecost as the completion of God's redemption in the Passover, so the early church saw Pentecost as the completion of Christ's work on Good Friday and Easter.

In the early years, the church combined the celebration of Jesus' ascension with Pentecost. It was a big day. We have a description of a fourth century celebration in Jerusalem. The day began for them with a processional to the traditional site of Pentecost at the Church of Mt. Zion, where appropriately there was a 9:00 a.m. service where Acts 2 was read. Around noon, the people gathered at the sanctuary on the traditional site of the ascension, and the passages about the ascension were read. The celebration continued and at night a great candlelight procession came into the city in the darkness, and eventually about midnight the people returned to their homes (*Westminster Dictionary of Worship* pp. 310-311). It was a big day, celebrating the completion of Christ's redemptive work. Jesus died, was raised, ascended, and sent the Holy Spirit.

In John 14-16, Jesus describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He promises an Advocate. The Greek word here is *paraclete*, a word used five different times in these three chapters. Jesus prays that another would be sent, the *paraclete*. This one we call the Holy Spirit. The one who comes in power on the upcoming day of Pentecost. Someone else. Not Jesus. But like Jesus.

The word *Paraclete* means "someone called alongside" to help. Its Latin translation gives us the word "advocate." In law courts it means someone "called in" to speak for someone, either as a defending counsel or to intercede with the judge on that person's behalf. Thus two possible English translations are "Counselor" and "Intercessor," which are found in some Bibles. The second idea of interceding can be seen in 1 John 2:1, where Jesus is our "advocate (*parakletos*) with the Father." Another greatly loved translation is "Comforter." This suggests someone "called in" to console those in need or grief; the original meaning of "comfort" through the Latin is to give strength or courage. Thus the Paraclete is our counselor, advocate, intercessor, comforter, strengthener – an all around helper (Richard Burridge *Lectionary Commentary* p. 554).

On Pentecost, we tend to focus on those various roles of the Holy Spirit. Today let's focus on one of those roles found in our scripture. **The Holy Spirit, Jesus says, is the guide and teacher of the church.** Listen again to his words: "*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.*"

Notice the Trinitarian linking here. The Son asks the Father. The Father sends the Spirit. The Spirit will remind us of Jesus. The *Nicene Creed* recognizes this linkage in its historic words: "we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified."

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son and will be with you. Jesus says “you are not really alone. The Spirit will come to be with you.” This Holy Spirit has many important roles: comforter, advocate, intercessor, inspirer, prosecutor. In today’s passage Jesus says the role of the Spirit is to guide and teach the church. *“The Holy Spirit... will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”*

We don’t often think of the Holy Spirit as teacher. Yet, this is critical. For us as a church and as individuals. There are always new circumstances and new conditions and new experiences that require us to keep learning.

The disciples of old needed to be taught. They had been with Jesus for several years. There was only so much that Jesus could teach them during those years. They may well have had difficulty absorbing all of Jesus’ teachings. They may have let slip the teachings they didn’t understand. It may have been a frightening thing to launch out on their mission with only what they could remember. The Spirit’s role was to remind them of Jesus’ teachings.

Most of us have had similar experiences. We were trying to make a decision or life is troubling or we’re confused and we remember something from the scriptures that we learned long ago.

The disciples also faced situations that Jesus' words didn't address directly. They had to rethink their faith and make decisions based on what they knew. Continually, the church developed their understanding and their knowledge as the Spirit led them to discover the truth. What was remarkable about the scriptures is that the disciples throughout history could always apply them to their situations today. The Spirit guided their understanding. In many cases, this knowledge was deeper and fuller than when Jesus first spoke them.

There is never an excuse for a lack of learning. There are many Christian people who stop learning and discovering the truth. In a sense they are resisting the Spirit's work in their life. We need to remember that a significant part of the Holy Spirit's work is to lead us to further truth, further depth. We can't do that if we resist growth and learning.

The supreme focus of the Holy Spirit's teaching is centered on Jesus Christ. As Jesus himself says: "he will bear witness to me". There are many who are concerned that we don't talk about the Spirit enough. I think there is a good reason for that- one of the Spirit's main roles is to point to Jesus not to the Spirit. To lift Jesus up, make him front and center. We can be suspicious of people which speak only of the Spirit of God when the Spirit is bearing witness supremely to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a teacher of truth.

The prime mode of the Holy Spirit’s teaching is **bringing to our remembrance what Jesus has taught us.** *“The Spirit...will remind you of all that I have said to you.”*

This remembrance begins for the church soon after Jesus has ascended. There are glimpses of this remembrance within the gospels themselves. When Jesus said *"Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days"*, the gospel writer adds this editorial comment: *"After he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this"* (John 2:19-22). After the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, one gospel-writer comments: *"His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him"* (John 12:16).

Of course, the writing of the four gospels themselves are a fulfillment of this promise too. We have the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because the Holy Spirit reminded the church of all that Jesus had said to them.

Not only did the Spirit remind the early church but the Spirit also brings to our remembrance key words and sayings of Jesus which provides guidance and perspective for our lives. Sayings like these: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."*, *"You are the salt of the earth"*, *"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today"*, *"love one another just as I have loved you"*, *"Go and make disciples of all nations"*, *Those who abide in me will produce much fruit"*, *"I am the resurrection and the life, the one who believes in me will never die."*

Jesus' promise to us is that the Holy Spirit teaches us by bringing to our remembrance what Jesus taught us. Have you had that experience? You're struggling with something and then you remember. You recall a promise of Jesus or of the scriptures. You realize that you're not quite living the Christian life fully. The Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance what we need to know to live the Christian life.

A final thought- on this day of Pentecost we are reminded that we need the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. Without the Holy Spirit, the Christian life is inconceivable, even impossible. Too many Christians try to live the life God calls us to on their own strength, on their own power.

In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul says the fruit of the Spirit is *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* Have you ever tried to work up those virtues all by yourself? Can you have love or patience by your own effort? I don't think so. I believe that whenever I'm generous, or peaceful, or patient- the Spirit has been at work in my life. I can't live this life by myself.

This is why Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that they need to constantly, consistently *"be filled with the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18). This is not a one time thing. We constantly need the Spirit's presence and filling to live the Christian life. We need to ask God's Spirit to help us and fill us.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy Spirit, you have spoken your words to the saints of old, guided their writing, and enable us to understand these scriptures. We are grateful for the Bible, for the great gift of revelation that it is for us. Enable us, we pray, to understand as we read and study. Bless us with a sense of your personal presence as we meditate on your scriptures.

Holy Spirit, you are also the one who comes alongside of us to help, the comforter. Many in our congregation need your comforting presence. We pray for those who heard good news this week and those who heard hard news. For those undergoing what seems like endless tests, or looming surgeries, or those struggling with saddening grief. Bring your healing touch to those who struggle with physical illness, those looking for work, and those who face a significant transition in their lives.

Holy Spirit, you are also the one to empower us for your mission in the world. We can not do ministry alone, we depend on you. We need your power to reach out in mission. We lift to you the activities, groups, and ministries that fill this church's calendar.

Spirit of God, bring enlightenment, wisdom, strength, and vision. We pray in the name of the One you lead us to- Jesus Christ. Amen.