

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: John 16:5-15

Sermon Title: "The Holy Spirit Is Coming to Work" (Trekking through the Gospel of John)

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The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. The Spirit is seen as a dove that descends from heaven and lands on Jesus, as he is being baptized. The Spirit is seen as fire, as it rests on the heads of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit is even heard as different languages coming from the mouths of people who lived in the same place all their lives. The Spirit is understood as a force that hovers over the waters of earth, as God is creating it.¹

The word for spirit in Hebrew is *ruach*, and that one word means spirit and wind and breath. Jesus says to Nicodemus that the wind, the Spirit, comes and goes as it pleases, and we don't know from where it comes or to where it goes.² There is a professor and Presbyterian missionary to the Philippines, Dale Bruner, who suggests that the Holy Spirit is the "shy" Person of the Trinity. Not shy as in timid, but shy as in not self-centeredness. The Spirit is other-centered, not obstructive. In his lectures, Dale Bruner will go

¹ John 1:32, Acts 2:1-4, and Genesis 1:2.

² John 3:8.

behind the blackboard, reach around with one hand, and point with a single finger to the image of Jesus: “Look at him, listen to him, learn from him, follow him, worship him, be devoted to him, serve him, love him, be preoccupied with him.” This is what Bruner calls the shyness of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus mentions the Holy Spirit a number of times in John’s Gospel. Way back in John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that one must be born of water and spirit in order to enter God’s kingdom. “Flesh is born of flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”³ In other words, one must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, infused with the desire to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to worship God the Father with love. The Holy Spirit gives this opportunity to be reborn from above, and thus become once more citizen of above, God’s kingdom.

Then Jesus mentions the Spirit again in John 6, after telling a crowd of people that his flesh and blood are real food. Everybody, including the disciples, has a difficult time accepting what Jesus has said, but he assures them that flesh counts for nothing in this matter. “The [Holy] Spirit gives life... The words I have

³ John 3:6.

spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”⁴ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but flesh, sadly, will die and be no more. In order for flesh to live forever, it must be born of the Holy Spirit. It must be regenerated, infused with holy power, reconciled, restored, redeemed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Are we sensing a pattern here? Are we getting a better idea of what the Holy Spirit is capable of? The Holy Spirit is into making dead things live. The Spirit is into taking hold of our lifeless, misguided lives, and turn them around so that they breathe and move and find fulfillment in God the Father. The Holy Spirit is like the paramedic who won't stop giving CPR, because he believes the unresponsive person can respond. The heart can beat again. Oxygen can enter the lungs, and pass that oxygen to the brain and vital organs. The unresponsive person can get up once more and continue his or her existence. The Holy Spirit never stops moving from one person to another, breathing life that comes from above.

But whereas the Holy Spirit resuscitates a person, it is not like the situation with the paramedic, in which the person may get a chance to thank the paramedic, but eventually will walk away and forget him. The

⁴ John 6:63

paramedic might have saved a life, but it is not as though he hangs out with the newly-resuscitated person, and they become lifelong friends. The paramedic and patient move on to the next thing.

The Holy Spirit, however, sticks with us. Jesus confirms this in John 14, after he has washed the disciples' feet during their Passover celebration. Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth... The Counselor, 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."⁵ Some translations call the Holy Spirit a Counselor, and others call the Spirit a Helper or a Comforter or an Advocate. The Greek word is *Paraclete*, which might be a foreign word to us, but the word does hold on to the characteristics of somebody being a Helper and Counselor and Advocate. The Scottish clergyman and author whom I tend to quote, William Barclay, says that the word *Paraclete* might have something to do with the idea of calling somebody in to do something. A *Paraclete* "might be a person called in to give witness in a courtroom in someone's favor; he might be an advocate called in to plead someone's cause when someone was under a charge which would issue in a

⁵ John 14:16-17, 26.

serious penalty; he might be an expert called in to give advice in some difficult situation.”⁶ Jesus says that the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, is the Spirit of truth. That one and only Spirit of truth will speak the truth to us, teaching us all things about God and Christ and faith and love and salvation. The Spirit will remind us of the truth once spoke to us in the past, so we don’t forget it, so we don’t misplace it when we need truth to guide us for today.

One other thing William Barclay mentions about the Holy Spirit as Paraclete. “Always,” he says, “a Paraclete is someone called in to help when the person who calls is in trouble or distress or doubt or bewilderment.” That sounds like us most of the time. Have we ever gone through one day, in which we weren’t in trouble or distressed, doubtful or drowning in bewilderment? That sounds like us most of the time, and Jesus knew it. This is why the Paraclete is called in, because there is always something wrong. There is always some obstacle for us to climb or step around. There is always a dead-end we get ourselves lost in. We need the Holy Spirit to stand by our sides. We need the Spirit of truth to remind us of God’s truth to never leave us nor forsake us. We need the Spirit to point the way, so we can find the right path, and get

⁶ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John: Volume 2*, 194.

out of our messes.

This brings us to another perspective of the Holy Spirit, which we discussed in one of our adult Sunday School classes not long ago. The Paraclete is called a Counselor and Comfort and Helper, so we tend to think of Somebody who guide us gently along the way. We think of the Spirit encouraging us to take the next step with God, to trust we can make it through whatever with the strength that Christ provides. We need such a Coach or Encourager in our lives, and the Spirit is more than happy to provide it. But we also need Somebody who is going to tell the truth, and tell it to us straight. We need the Spirit of truth to be the One who doesn't sugar-coat things, who doesn't ignore a bad situation when we get ourselves into one. We need Somebody to light a fire under us, and even kick of in the pants from time to time. This is where the Paraclete is not just an Coach and Encourager but also an Admonitioner, a Reprimander.

Jesus says as much to the disciples in John 16. "If I depart," Jesus says, "I will send [The Holy Spirit] to you. And when he has come, he will convict the world of sin in regards to righteousness and judgment." The Holy Spirit holds up our sin, dangles it in front of us, so that we see it and acknowledge it.

For those who persist in their sin, thinking they see nothing, thinking they can persist because there are no repercussions, things are not going to go well for them. The Holy Spirit convicts them of their sin, because whether they believe in Jesus or not, he is still the Lord and Savior of the world. He still died and rose for our sin, and so we all need his righteousness to live forever with God. The Holy Spirit confronts us all with that truth, and pricks our heart so that we feel pain and regret. We all know that we have kept God out of certain plans and goals and projects and decisions. We know we have denied Jesus to be our Savior, to love us and direct us as he desires so to do. Our selfishness pains us.

But we don't remain in pain or regret for long. The Holy Spirit admonishes – holds our sin in front of us – and encourages us to move away from that sin. The Holy Spirit is ready to throw our sin away, if we are willing to confess our guilt and seek God's forgiveness. The Spirit encourages us to ask forgiveness and to remain close to our God and Father.

The Holy Spirit admonishes us, convicts us, in righteousness, Jesus says. Paul reminds us in Romans that nobody is righteous, “not even one.”⁷ No

⁷ Romans 3:10.

matter how we try to present ourselves as perfect, we never will be perfect on our own. No matter how much we try to say the right words, we tend to misspeak. None of us is righteous, so we better not go around thinking that we hold such a virtue. Only One was righteous, the Holy Spirit points us to him. Only One was perfect before coming to earth, and lived the perfect life according to God's will, and died the perfect death to rid us of our unrighteousness. The Holy Spirit as both Admonisher and Encourager convicts us of our "false standards of righteousness."⁸ The Spirit reveals what true righteousness is in Jesus Christ, so that his righteousness may become ours. We might become perfect through him.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of judgment. Before the cross of Jesus stands evil: the evil we do and say and think, and the general evil that is inside us because we are sinful human beings. Evil stands there, sentenced, condemned, and ready to be punished. Yet before Jesus' cross we realize that it is evil on trial and not us. It is the evil within us, making us do what we shouldn't do, making us not do those things that Christ would do for others. It is evil that holds us in chains that is punished for its influence. We are left to go free as redeemed, restored people of

⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John*, 326.

God. The Holy Spirit points this out.

Just as God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit does not want us to remain in evil, but to live in truth. He will guide us in all truth, not speaking on his own authority just as Jesus never would. He will tell of things to come. He will glorify Christ, and everything that belongs to Christ the Spirit will declare it to us, give it as a free gift from God.

We see the Holy Spirit is different shapes and forms. We have different names for the Spirit. All in all, the Holy Spirit is our Ally, just as Christ is our Brother and God is our Father. An ally doesn't abandon us to our destruction. An ally tells it like it is, keeps it real, especially when we are acting stupid. Whatever new territories we explore, whatever new situations in which we find ourselves, we can bet that the Holy Spirit will be there.

Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the Good News: what we deserve to have, Jesus has carried for us: sin and destruction and death. Jesus is the source of eternal life, and we can have such life if we accept him and believe. Believe this good news, brothers and sisters: In Jesus Christ you and I are forgiven! Thanks be to God! Amen.