

Foundations 9: I Believe in the Holy Spirit

March 13, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

John 16:7-14

[Jesus said to his disciples:] 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

We are continuing our series on the twelve statements of the Apostles' Creed, which has formed in summary for almost 2000 years the foundation of why we Christians believe what we believe. Each statement is based on Scripture. This week we will focus on the statement, **I Believe in the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit is one of my favorite topics in the Apostles' Creed. There's a number of reasons for that. For one, my understanding of the Holy Spirit has evolved over the years. The Holy Spirit has remained unchanged. It was *my understanding* that has evolved.

When I was a teenager, I perceived the Holy Spirit to be more of a holy force of some kind. Part of the may have been was that I was a teenager when the first Star Wars movie came out and one of the common phrases said among those in the know was: "May the force be with you." And I guess I pictured the Holy Spirit as some kind of divine power source emanating from God the Father: "May the Holy Spirit be with you" kind of thing. It likely added to me perception of the Holy spirit as some kind of force or power source because I heard many adults in church refer to the Holy Spirit as an "it," as in, "The Holy Spirit will work in your life. It is a gift of God." It was only after I accepted Christ as Lord and Savior and then began to get a better grasp on what people were referring to by saying we believe in a triune God, that I began to better understand the Holy Spirit not as an "it" but as a Person.

The Apostles' Creed is an affirmation of faith about our triune God. We say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty. ...I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son." And now we focus on the third Person of the Trinity by affirming together, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

In our Scripture reading today, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit in a way that could only be referencing another Person. This person, whom Jesus refers to as "the Advocate," will "come to us." He will "prove the world to be wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment." Elsewhere in Scripture it is written that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us (Rom. 8:26). We could grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Ananias and Sapphira told lies to the Holy Spirit and paid for it with their lives (Acts 5:1-11). The Holy Spirit is the source of the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit lavishes gifts on the followers of Jesus, including (but not limited to):

Apostleship, prophecy, teaching, deeds of power, healing, assistance, forms of leadership, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:27-28; 14:26-27).

Paul compares the giving of spiritual gifts to the body. Just as a body needs its individual parts to work together (and in harmony) in order for the body to function as it was designed, so the church is made up of many members of the body of Christ, all of us with different spiritual gifts, so that together we can build up the body of Christ to the glory of God. What that means for you and for me is that each one of us has at least one spiritual gift, given to us by the Holy Spirit, which is to be used together with other members of the body to glorify God. We were never meant to go it alone when it comes to our walk of faith. We were designed to work together, to rely upon each other, for we cannot accomplish alone what we were designed to do together as a team, or as a body, if you will.

And the greatest spiritual gift of all is love. Anyone who has attended a wedding has likely heard the reading of 1 Corinthians 13, often referred to as the love chapter. What a lot of people miss is that that chapter is read outside the original context, and so it loses some of its meaning. After listing some of the spiritual gifts like tongues, prophecy, and words of knowledge, Paul points out that none of those spiritual gifts mean anything if they are not founded in love. As Paul points out in that well-known, but often misinterpreted Scripture: "...as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ...And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:8, 13)

If you really want your church to come alive, then you will want to pray about what your spiritual gift is and how it is to be used as part of Team Bethany to glorify God. The more people there are who are using their spiritual gifts to the glory of God, the more excited those people get about serving God. The more people there are serving God, the more the energy level in the church goes up. After a while the Holy Spirit becomes

activated so much in the church that it becomes palpable. And people want to be involved in something that exciting.

Now compare a church where a bunch of people are active in serving the Lord with their spiritual gifts to a church which treats their pastor as the hired gun who is expected to carry the load, and you have compared a live church to a dead or dying church. According to Scripture, pastors are intended “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13). Wow!

At the beginning of this sermon I mentioned there were a couple of reasons the Holy Spirit is one of my favorite topics in the Apostle’s Creed. The second reason is that we don’t have to just talk about the Holy Spirit; we can experience Him. Jesus sent the Advocate to be with us here and now, from the day he ascended into heaven to the day he returns. That means that all the spiritual gifts that were available to the disciples in the days of the disciples and the apostle Paul are available to us today.

One of the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given me is the gift of healing prayer. The Holy Spirit has provided a number of miracles in this congregation already as a consequence of healing prayer. We had one person who was diagnosed with cancer and was given only two years to live. Over five years later he’s still going strong. He is still being treated for cancer, and we recognize that God works through medical professionals as well, but we also give glory to God that the person we prayed for is healthy and active today. Recently, one person asked for healing of her migraine headaches, and the Lord has removed that malady from her.

There is still much I don’t understand about the gift I was given. I would love it if everybody we prayed for was healed, but there is no guarantee that that will happen. And because there was no guarantee that a healing would happen, I disdained the gift for awhile. I didn’t want to give people false hope and I didn’t want to look foolish for asking for healing that didn’t happen. Yet I have discovered that whereas when healing prayer is offered, a healing might happen, but if no healing prayer is offered a healing is much less likely to happen. All I can do is offer the prayer, and it is up to God the Holy Spirit to do the actual healing. Thus, when healing occurs, it is essential to give the glory where the credit is due – to God alone – and to give thanks when God chooses you to be an instrument of His grace.

So, we’re going to wrap the sermon up so that there is more time at the end of the service for people to come forward for healing prayer, if they feel so led by the Spirit.