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John 14:15-31
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Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Today we are beginning our series on the Holy Spirit. Now you may rightfully ask, ‘Isn’t this out of the liturgical season? Pentecost came back in early June. Isn’t that when we typically hear about the coming of the Holy Spirit?’

Well as I was studying and preaching on prayer, I kept bumping into the Holy Spirit and thought, shouldn’t the third person of the Trinity get more play than just one day in the year? If we don’t preach much about the Holy Spirit, then we must not know much about the Holy Spirit. So over these next couple of weeks, I aim to fill in some of those gaps.

Who is the Holy Spirit? What are the rolls of the Holy Spirit? What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit? And finally how can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? These are some of the topics that we’ll explore along the way.

Several recent books allude to this absence. Francis Chan’s *The Forgotten God, Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*, Tyler Staton’s *The Familiar Stranger, Re-Introducing the Holy Spirit to Those in Search of an Experiential Spirituality*, and Billy Graham’s *The Holy Spirit, Advocating God’s Power in Your Life*. If you’re more inclined to listen to a podcast than read a book, check out Tyler Staton’s podcast on Spotify *The Familiar Stranger*. There he interviews others from various faith traditions about their experience with the Holy Spirit. It is incredible. These will be our tour guides along the way. If you’d like to study along, I would highly recommend it.

So first, let me ask, “Who is the Holy Spirit?” What would you say?

Our text this morning comes from the words of Jesus to his disciples. It’s Passover. Imagine sitting around the dinner table one last time with Jesus, just before his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus has some very important last instruction to give his friends. Needless to say, they were overwhelmed with how they would remember it all.

It was then that Jesus said,

15 “If you love me, keep my commands. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— **17** the 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. **18** I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **19** Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. **20** On that day you will

realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. **21** Whoever 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.”

22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

23 Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

24 Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. **26** But the Advocate, 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. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

28 “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. **29** I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. **30** I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, **31** but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

Today we ask, “Who is the Holy Spirit?” Well to begin, let’s watch this short video from the Bible Project and see for ourselves. <https://bibleproject.com/guides/holy-spirit/>

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the eternal, pre-existent presence of God from the beginning with the Father and the Son who exists in the present and will exist in the future.

The Holy Spirit as we saw in the video is the breath of God. The ruach. In the Nicene Creed we state, “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, who has spoken through the prophets.”

The Holy Spirit is the third person of our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a real person with a will, feelings, and the ability to be grieved.

Pastor Francis Chan writes, “The Holy Spirit is the one who fills believers with God’s love and the one who enables us to love one another.”¹

The Holy Spirit is both experiential and mysterious. Like we heard in the children’s message this morning, we can feel the wind blow, but we do not see it. Likewise, we can feel the Holy Spirit moving, but we may not see it at face value.

Sometimes in worship there is a song that really moves me to where I can’t even get the words out, but I just bask in the worship taking place around me. Or when I lift my hands in praise to God...even though that might be weird for some. That is the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit is active in creation. We heard how the ruach of God or breath of God hovered over the chaos at creation and created all things. Whenever we express ourselves in creative ways that brings life to us or others. That is the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit produces fruit in each believer. We’ll talk more about that later.

The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness by interceding for us to God through prayers and groans when we can’t find the words. Recently I was in the ICU with a friend and his son who was on a ventilator. That is one of the most helpless and scary things to witness as a parent. I know, because I have been there. I knew exactly what he was feeling and how helpless he felt. All he could do was groan and cry. Words would not come.

That is the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit empowers us to be witnesses for Jesus. Have you ever had that moment when you knew it was time to speak up about Jesus and some how words just sort of popped into your head and you shared them? That is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and sanctifies us, transforming us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. I know it’s the Holy Spirit grabbing my attention when something I had said, or done, or thought that was wrong just won’t go away. Until I confess it to God or apologize to the other person, it just weighs on my conscience.

The other day, I was at a preaching conference with other pastors from our Presbytery and someone made a naive blanket statement about soldiers and war that touched a nerve within my own combat experiences. So I rudely cut them off to correct them. Well it sort of put a wedge between us and it bothered me for the rest of the night.

So the next day, I apologized to them for being so insensitive. They really appreciated that I took the initiative to clear the air between us. Now when we see

¹ Francis Chan, *Forgotten God, Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook Books, 2009) 95.

each other at Presbytery meetings, it won't be awkward or contentious. That's the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit reminds us of all that Jesus taught his disciples while he was physically with them. During my sermon writing time, on Tuesdays, I rely on the Holy Spirit to communicate what I need to share with you each Sunday. As I write, scriptures and ideas pop into my head that I need to write down. That is the Holy Spirit.

And then I let my sermons germinate over the next couple of days and see if anything comes to mind that I need to revise on Sunday morning. Usually it is about taking something out that doesn't sound like Jesus or adding an idea that I suddenly had. That is the Holy Spirit.

Billy Graham quoting the Reverend Gottfried Osei-Mensah of Kenya said, "If the role of the Holy Spirit is to teach, ours is to be diligent students of the Word."

Each of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, describe the presence of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism and how at that moment, "heaven was opened, and the Spirit of God descended [upon Jesus] like a dove."²

The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians that they "received the Holy Spirit when they heard the word of truth about Jesus, the gospel of their salvation. And then having believed, they were marked in Jesus with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of those who belong to God."³

So here we see that the Holy Spirit is an actual being that descends from God to us. And once we receive it, it can never go away. It is a seal. A stamped mark. A signature that reminds us that we are God's creation, that we belong to God in this life, and that at the end of our lives we will return to God.

Just over the Columbia River in the great state of Oregon, if you buy sodas in an aluminum can or a glass bottle it will come with a ten cent deposit. In other words, you pay just a little extra up front for the use of the container with a promise that when you finish drinking the contents that if you return that container to the manufacturer, you will get that money back. It's a deposit or guarantee that what belongs to the manufacturer will return to the manufacturer after we are done with it. It's the same thing with how the Holy Spirit works within us.

Jesus from his words in John's Gospel told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be an advocate that he would send to be with us forever. The Greek word that John used for advocate is *parakleton*. It can also be translated as helper, comforter, or counselor. We get this sense that the Holy Spirit is a friend or guide who comes alongside us with a voice of truth, reason, and wisdom.

² Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22

³ Ephesians 1:13-14

Recently Karen and I hired an advocate, called a lawyer, to help us draft up wills, powers of attorney, and advanced health care directives. We did not want to leave a legal mess for our loved ones should we die. But we don't know very much about Washington's estate and tax laws. So we hired an expert who did. Their job was to advise us on how to best protect our estate and our children in the event of our deaths.

I haven't worked much with lawyers, but here's a few things I learned.

First, they are dang expensive. Wow! I never expected it would cost THAT much.

But as expensive as they are upfront, hopefully what this person helped us draft will save a lot of heart ache and money on the backend...because our intentions have been clearly laid out for them.

Second, lawyers are really smart. They spend a lot of time in law school pouring over case law, learning the legal precedent behind our laws, and figuring out how the laws work.

And third, they work on behalf of the client. In a court of law, a lawyer or advocate speaks on behalf of the client to make sure that they don't say anything that might create further trouble. They intercede before the judge. They guide the client. They lead or nudge in certain directions. Help discern what is right or best. But ultimately they should not force the client to do something that the client does not want to do. The client is free to listen to the advocate or not.

The Holy Spirit works in the same way. As a counselor, helper, or advocate, the Holy Spirit nudges us in God's directions that are for our good. But the Holy Spirit never forces himself upon us.

We also see in Jesus' words how the Holy Spirit is one who never leaves us, nor forsakes us.⁴ Does not leave us orphaned. Is with us forever. Unlike our lawyer, thank God the Holy Spirit isn't paid hourly though he never stops working on our behalf. Could you imagine the legal bill?

In verse 25, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things and remind us of all that he has said to us. Author Tyler Staton writes, "To put it plainly, the Holy Spirit has no original content. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is entirely about translating the teachings and promises of Jesus in a way that forms us at the deepest level... The Holy Spirit pushes the teachings of Jesus from the head where they can be understood, down into the heart, where they can heal our emotions and become a new foundation for us to live from."⁵

⁴ Deuteronomy 31:8; Hebrews 13:5

⁵ Tyler Staton, *The Familiar Stranger; Reintroducing The Holy Spirit to Those in Search of an Experiential Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Books, 2025), 29.

And finally we see that the The Holy Spirit is the peace that Jesus said he would leave with us. Much different than what the world gives. So we should not let our hearts be troubled or be afraid.

So how do we tap into the power of the Holy Spirit today?

We believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When we do that, scripture tells us that Jesus plants his Holy Spirit in us.

We stay connected to Jesus' Word through regular worship and daily Bible reading.

We yield to God's will and allow the Holy Spirit to influence every aspect of our daily living.

We slow down enough to be more aware of the Holy Spirit's presence and create intentional space to hear the voice of God.

We show our love for Jesus by obeying his commands and living consistently with the character of the Holy Spirit, displaying its fruit.

We choose Jesus' peace over the ways of the world and we do not let our hearts be troubled or afraid.

And finally, we remember the mystery of our faith that proclaims through eating this bread and drinking this cup we take Jesus literally into us, believing that just as "Jesus is in the Father. We are in Jesus. And Jesus is in us."

And that is the Holy Spirit.

Amen.