

This morning let's continue our study of the Apostles' Creed with a discussion on the third belief statement: "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Now that's a short, simple statement; however, based on all that the Spirit does, it is probably the most understated line in all of the Apostles' Creed. Every time we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we mean that we believe that there is a living God who is able and willing to enter human personality and change it. When we speak of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, we are speaking of God's active work in our lives; of God's way of leading us, guiding us, forming and shaping us as we sing in *Spirit Song*; of God's power and presence to comfort and encourage us and to make us into the people God wants us to be. The Spirit is the voice of God whispering, wooing and beckoning us.

The word "Spirit" appears about 500 times in the Bible. There are eighty to ninety references to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, depending upon how one translates the Hebrew word for spirit. In some cases the Spirit of God is said to be what gives each human being life. In other cases it is the source of creative and artistic gifts. Sometimes the Old Testament teaches that the Spirit is the source of superhuman strength, wisdom and leadership.

But while the Spirit is often described as empowering and giving special gifts and abilities, the Spirit's most frequent work in the Old Testament is in ensuring that God's voice is heard so that God's purpose and will can be conveyed. One of the most famous references to the Spirit is in Isaiah 61:1 which Jesus quoted when He preached in His hometown of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the oppressed." The Old Testament shows God's Spirit working primarily through the leaders and prophets—guiding, influencing, and speaking through them as they pursue God's will. Whereas in the New Testament, the words of the prophet Joel concerning the Spirit are fulfilled: "I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions." At Pentecost this became a reality when the Spirit descended on all who believed in Jesus Christ.

While there are limited references to the Spirit in the Old Testament, the impact of the Spirit is seen throughout the New Testament. One of the most important references is found in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John when Jesus tells His disciples that He would be leaving them soon. In John 14:15-26 Jesus promised to send them help, to send the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort them.

Read John 14:15-26

Now if you were one of the disciples hearing this, how would you have interpreted what Jesus was saying? Who is this Spirit? How would you define the Holy Spirit; how would you describe the Spirit? Growing up in the Methodist Church in the South, the Bible Belt, in the 1950's and

1960's, I didn't hear much about the Holy Spirit. I don't know about you, but the Spirit was not even mentioned or discussed in Sunday School lessons or sermons. The only reference to it was in the Apostles' Creed and the Doxology, and that was only to the Holy Ghost which definitely could fuel the imagination of a young person. The church was basically not using the power of the Spirit; it was as if we had the firewood, but no fire – the fire being the Holy Spirit. Then for some reason, the church fortunately started emphasizing the Spirit again in the late 1960's.

Now the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and serves the Father and the Son, or as the Nicene Creed states: "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The concept of the Trinity is difficult for many to understand and fully grasp, because when the theologians try to explain it, it usually goes over our heads. So let me use two simple illustrations which I hope will explain the Trinity. You may have heard the Trinity explained as the three stages of water: liquid, ice and steam; each one is H₂O but in different forms. For the second illustration, let me use myself as an example: to Judy I am her husband; to my sons Jack and Ben I am their father; and to Trevor, Logan and Eleanor, I'm Grandpa. I am the same person, but I am seen differently by my wife, sons and grandchildren. The point is that when we pray, regardless of whom we address in prayer, we are speaking to one God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Each member of the Trinity thinks, wills, and acts; they are in an inseparable relationship with one another.

The Bible always pictures the Spirit as a person and not merely as an impersonal force. According to the Bible, the Spirit convinces the world of sin, of righteousness and of justice. He comforts, sustains, and empowers those who believe in Jesus Christ and guides them to all truth. Jesus and God come into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. I like to think of the Spirit as the conscience of a Christian – that little voice within each of us that tells us right from wrong. Someone said that you might as well try to hear without ears, or breathe without lungs, as try to live a Christian life without the Spirit of God in your heart.

Depending on which translation of the Bible you use, there are many names by which the Holy Spirit is known. Verse 16 in our text states: "I will ask the Father, and He will send another Advocate, who will be with you forever." Instead of Advocate, other translations use the terms Counselor, Companion, Friend, Helper, and Comforter. Each of these names describes how the Spirit ministers to us and works within this world. As an old highway engineer, I would add another name to this list – Traffic Sign. Just like the signs along the Interstate and streets give us directions to where we are going and how to get there, so does the Holy Spirit provide guidance to Christians on how to live as God wants us to, so that someday we will reach our final destination – heaven.

Romans 8:26 tells us that when we are praying and we can't come up with the right words, the Spirit intercedes for us. Maybe you have experienced times when the right words came to you out of nowhere. I remember when Judy and I lived in Atlanta, and attended Mt Pisgah UMC,

we had a worship service with different people giving personal testimonies. A twelve year old boy got up and gave one of the most moving testimonies that I have ever heard. When he finished his mother turned to Judy amazed and said: "That's not what he practiced;" he was led by the Spirit.

Of course, this does not work all the time, especially if you don't prepare properly. A preacher got so busy one week that he decided to trust what Romans 8:26 says and didn't work on his sermon; he believed that the Spirit would tell him what to say. So on Sunday morning when he got up to preach, he whispered: "O Lord, let your Spirit give me the right words." To which the Lord replied, "Brother, you should have prepared; you are on your own!"

It is the Spirit that equips us for ministry. Jesus Himself received the Spirit as He began His ministry here on earth. For thirty years Jesus lived in Nazareth growing up and working in the carpenter's shop caring for His mother and step-brothers and step-sisters. However, with the emergence of John the Baptist from the wilderness, Jesus knew that the time had come to begin His ministry and His destiny with the cross. So He left His mother and family and went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist.

Each of the four gospels records this event with a few different details. Listen to Luke's account from the third chapter: "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist testified stating: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him." The key word here is "remain." The Spirit was with Jesus throughout His ministry here on earth, equipping Him.

Before Jesus could begin His ministry, He needed to be equipped with the Holy Spirit. In both his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, Luke has the Holy Spirit playing a prominent role. For Luke baptism represented a sign of the empowerment of the Spirit. Jesus could do what He did, in Luke's mind, because He was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Like our Lord and Savior, our baptism both commissions and equips us for service to God. The Holy Spirit is like the fuel that powers our cars; the most powerful automobile cannot go anywhere without gasoline. Each of us is equipped with the Spirit when we accept Jesus Christ into our hearts. All we have to do is turn on the ignition and press the accelerator, and go where God leads us.

Think of this in another way. A glove cannot do anything by itself, but when your hand is in it, it can do many things. The Christian is like a glove. It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the hand, who does the Lord's will. Thus, it is essential that we make room for the hand, the Spirit, in our lives, so that every finger hole is filled and fully serving the Lord. We can do this through a daily quiet time of prayer and communicating with the Lord.

In verses 16-18 in our text, Jesus promised: “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – 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. I will not leave you as orphans.” Note the keywords – the Spirit will be forever and will dwell in you. When we accept Jesus Christ into our hearts, the Spirit comes to dwell within us – to guide and comfort us through the trials of life – to be our constant companion.

Have you ever given the concept of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you much thought? We know we love Jesus. We trust in Him and try to do His will, but have you accepted the fact that as a Christian the Spirit dwells within you; is a constant part of your life. One way that we can be assured that we are following the guidance of the Spirit is by how we relate to God and each other; how we live our daily lives. In Galatians 5:22, the Apostle Paul identifies the fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Are these qualities present in our lives; do we exhibit them in our daily life; can others see the influence of the Spirit in our lives? Are we Spirit filled?

As the Spirit descended on Jesus and went with Him throughout His ministry here on earth, so the Spirit is with us right now. However, many Christians never accept the equipping power of the Spirit or the opportunity to make a difference for the Lord in this world. A. W. Tozer noted that “though every believer has the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit does not have every believer.” Many Christians go through life thinking only of themselves and never heeding the call of God to service.

Many churches are also guilty of this. A man was visiting a church and was so moved by the sermon and the music that he stood up in the middle of the service and started shouting: “Amen! Alleluia!” One of the ushers rushed over and told him to sit down and be quiet. “We don’t do that in this church,” the usher said. The visitor said: “But I’ve got the Spirit.” To which the usher replied: “Well, you didn’t get it here; so be quiet.” I hope that is never said of High Desert.

Then there are the people who think that you have to have special talents to serve God. However, if God only used perfect people, nothing would ever get done. For example, at first glance, the disciples were probably the most inadequate group of people for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ as there ever was. But look where we are today, over 2000 years later, because of their willingness to answer the call and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Prior to Pentecost these men were hiding in fear, but when the Spirit came upon them, nothing could stop them from proclaiming the good news of their Lord and Savior. The point is that God will use anybody who is available and willing to listen to Him. Remember God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Saying that we are not smart enough, good enough or

talented enough is just making excuses. All of us have something that God can use to make a difference in the lives of those around us, if we will only follow the guidance of the Spirit.

Saint Teresa of Avila said that Jesus Christ has no body on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours. We are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is seen; ours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and ours are the hands with which He is to bless others. However, sometimes we think that by ourselves we can't make a difference; I'm only one person; and I don't have any special talents and I don't have much money or time to give. But the Bible is full of examples of people making a difference for the Lord when they were willing to step out in faith and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Just look at the disciples, Paul, Timothy, and James. And these examples are not restricted to Biblical characters; look at the difference that Martin Luther, John Wesley, Mother Teresa and Billy Graham have made.

There is no limit to what we as individuals and as a church can do when we step out in faith equipped by the Holy Spirit. However, I have long believed that we as individuals and churches have never taken full advantage of the power that God has given us in the Spirit. And today that power for change is needed more than ever in our country, Rio Rancho, this church and our lives. Think of the difference we could make if we only seek and follow the guidance of the Spirit. May each one of us here this morning heed the guidance of the Spirit and let it empower us for service to the Lord. I believe in the Holy Spirit; do you? Amen