

September 23, 2018

Life in the Spirit

John 14-16

"If only we'd been there when Jesus was around," people say, "faith would have been so easy. Of course, everyone would believe if they could see Jesus for themselves. We could ask Him all our questions. It would be perfect." But the majority of people who did see Jesus, didn't believe. He was intriguing but confusing. Many people thought Him mad. After all, Jesus claimed to be God, come as a human being.

At His last meal with His disciples, He says, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."* Thomas said, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him"* (John 14:1-7).

He goes on to promise He will be with His people from that day to this. In fact, He promises it will be easier, not harder, to know Him in this new reality. He promises to send His own Spirit, His own presence, His own life, to be within us. He says,

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and 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; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:16-20).

Jesus is describing – as well as one can in human language – a mystery in which God is one yet three, three yet one – Father, Son, and Spirit. As in a perfect relationship, they are three distinct beings yet one in mind and purpose; one in character and will yet three in our experience of them. We've talked about God our Father, God **for** us (Psalm 145) and God the Son, Jesus, God **with** us (Philippians 2:1-11). Today we think about God **withIN** us, God the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit in us personally

Jesus refers to the Spirit with a Greek word "*paracletos*" which can be translated as "advocate," "helper," or "comforter."

The Spirit is our "advocate." An "advocate" is a legal term meaning someone who intercedes on your behalf before the Judge (God) and pleads your case – someone who "goes to bat for you." All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God: we all NEED an advocate. The Spirit intercedes, covering us with the grace, mercy, and forgiveness bought by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Spirit helps us know and appreciate the hope, love, and forgiveness we have received through Jesus.

The Spirit is our "comforter." *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you ... The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them*" (John 14:18-21). As well as acting as our legal defender, the advocate comforts his client – us. Have you noticed how, when someone is deeply distressed after a tragedy, having other people around, hugging them, being alongside them and empathizing with them gives them strength? Nothing really changes. The tragedy is still a tragedy. The dead person is still dead. But comforters can provide the support we need to cope. The Spirit – the presence and power of Jesus – can do this in our lives as we go through the trials and tribulations of life.

The Spirit is our "helper." The Spirit helps us live wisely, rightly, and well. Even though we are forgiven, we still must live our lives in a challenging, crazy world. We no longer do so alone. God – our ever-present help in times of trouble, our counselor, our wisdom, our guide, our Saviour, our Lord – is always within us.

- *"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"* (John 14:26)
- *"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. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you"* (John 16:13-14).

With this comes a call to obedience and holy living. Three times in a few sentences, Jesus says, *"If you love me, keep my commands ... Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me ... Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching"* (John 14, 16, 21, 23). This is a BIG deal. The Spirit can help us begin to live as Jesus would have us live, **if** we give Him the space and freedom in our lives to speak, to challenge, and to change us.

The Spirit in the church

This passage was spoken to Jesus' disciples: individually but also corporately.

Jesus says to the group: *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love*

each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other” (John 15:9-17).

What does this all mean? It means

- God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is among us as a people. Whenever we gather – wherever we gather – we expect God, Jesus and Spirit to be here.
- We expect an atmosphere of love, openness, honesty, forgiveness, caring.
- When we gather, it is all about Jesus. To quote Paul, we are *"determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 2:2). We expect to find Christ in others and that is all we are looking for. We don't worship "worship," impeccable teaching, or beautiful people.
- We don't care "How did the service go?" What matters is whether, in our hearts and souls we met Jesus. God is the primary agent in the gathering. The truth is, from the only point of view that matters – God's – it is very likely no human knows how the service went. Only He knows how His Spirit has changed lives.

Dallas Willard writes: *"Far too often we approach our gathering together all prepared to major on minors. Our attitude is captured by the children's rhyme: 'Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been? I've been to London, see the great Queen. Pussycat, pussycat, what saw you there? I saw a wee mouse under her chair.' Why consider the wee mouse, when your eyes could be on the Queen, whom, supposedly, you went to see anyway? Why look at some aspect of performance when you could come to Jesus in the midst?"* (Dallas Willard). The church is about Jesus and Him among us.

The Spirit in the World

"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. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned" (John 16:7-11).

We live in a world that has forgotten some hard realities. We – as the people of God, living in this world – have forgotten some hard realities:

1. ***The reality of sin.*** The Spirit leads us **FROM** wrong behaviours. Lying, bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander matter (Ephesians 4: 25-31).

Lack of integrity matters. Racism matters. Sin is still sin. I wonder if Christians still recognize sin anymore when “the world” sees us as angry and nasty (or more so) as everyone else? When we condone leaders who lack integrity and good character and lie, are we not condoning sin? When we speak with anger, hatred, fear, and about building walls, are we out of step with Jesus? Before we judge other people, do we need to ask the Spirit to convict us of sin, again? (“*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*” [Matthew 7:1-5]).

2. ***The reality of righteousness*** (to use an old-fashioned word). The Spirit leads us **TO** integrity, character, compassion, justice, and love. In a world obsessed with power, greed, selfishness, and an ends-justifies-the-means value system, righteousness still matters to God: right hearts before God, right treating of other people, and right living. How are we doing at being righteous? Are we judgmental people or people of generous compassion? Are we fearful people or people of unconditional love? Are we bitter, angry people or are we people of mercy and forgiveness? Are we people who want to build walls and throw stones or people who want to build bridges and extend hands of love? Do we need to ask the Spirit to rekindle a passion for godly righteousness within us?
3. ***The reality of judgement***. Ultimately God’s justice and righteousness will win out. Fake news, lies, greed, racism, sexism, selfishness, pride, corruption, anger, and hatred – the sin – will be shown up for the ugliness and evil they are. Truth and righteousness will win out. God is the judge; not me, not you. My responsibility is that one day, some day, I will be accountable for my life, my attitudes, my values, and my choices. My responsibility is to know Jesus well enough that I am following His lead and I have a clear conscience before Him.

Ultimately, we do all fall short or who we are called to be. But the Spirit with us. He is on our side, advocating for us, comforting us, and helping us. He is interceding for us (Romans 8:26). God forgives us. That’s great news.

Personally, and as a church community, the Spirit is with us. Jesus is with us. God is with us. We are called to be people filled with the Holy Spirit: passionate about what God is passionate about: righteousness, justice, peace, mercy, grace, compassion, and radical, unconditional love.

The Spirit calls us to love others as God has loved us: while we were still sinner He loved us. So we are called to love all people. He **IS** with us to help us. Our calling is to live so people “*know we are Christians by our love*” (John 13:35).

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