

Knowing God: Father, Son, and Spirit

September 2023



Readings, Reflections, and Prayers

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Monday, September 11: Psalm 145 (Knowing God)

This Fall we'll be revisiting some of our core beliefs. We share these convictions with believers in many Christian traditions. We'll also be looking at a few emphases that are important to us in the Baptist tradition. This September we'll be looking at God: who He is, how He reveals Himself, and how we know Him. These are core doctrines we hold in common with people in all Christian denominations.

When we speak of "God" we mean the God we meet in Scripture: the Creator and Sustainer of everything; the One who saves us; the One who fills us. God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a doctrine called "the Trinity." God reveals Himself as three-in-one, one-in-three, a tri-unity, or trinity.

God the Father is fully God. Jesus (the Son) is fully God. The Holy Spirit is fully God. These three relate to one another in perfect love and unity, so they are of one will and mind, despite being three distinct persons. Like a wife and husband in a really, really, really good marriage, each Person is unique and distinct, but they act together in perfect harmony, one in mind, will, purpose, character, and action.

Psalm 145 is a great introduction to who God is. What are some of his characteristics? He is a God

- Of mighty acts and power.
- Of majesty, glorious splendor, and wonderful miracles.
- Of awe-inspiring deeds and greatness.
- Of wonderful goodness and righteousness.
- Of mercy and compassion, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
- Who helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads.
- Who gives hope to those who need it.
- Who satisfies the hunger and thirst of every living thing.
- Who is righteous in everything he does.
- Who is filled with kindness.
- Who is close to all who call on him.
- Who grants the desires of those who fear him.
- Who hears their cries for help and rescues them.
- Who Lord protects all those who love him.

If you were to describe God to a friend, how would you do it? What qualities would you emphasize?

If you were to write a psalm to God, what would you say? Try doing just that ...

*You are Creator of all.
You are Sustainer of all.
You are Saviour of all.
Your glory and majesty
are beyond our understanding.
Your power is too awesome to behold.
And yet your love enfolds us as a gentle breeze.*

*You are Saviour of all.
You are Sustainer of all.
You are Creator of all.
Help us tell of your glory.
Help us share of your love.
Help us minister your grace.
We bless your holy name,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Amen*

John Birch

Tuesday, September 12: Genesis 1:1-3, 26-27 and Colossians 1:15-23 (Knowing God)

The doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly stated in the Bible. There is no single verse of Scripture that reads, *"The one God is three persons."* Instead, this doctrine is the product of lengthy biblical and theological reflection, from early Christians to the present. The first followers of Jesus, from their Jewish background, inherited a strict allegiance to ONE God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)). But they also confessed Jesus as the risen Saviour, Lord, and God Incarnate (God in human flesh). In addition, they knew the ongoing personal of God within their community, a presence they knew as the Holy Spirit, God-within-them ([Acts 2](#)). The One God was Three. One-in-three. Three-in-One.

Christians throughout the ages share the experience of these early believers. We know God, our Father. We know Jesus, the Son. We know the Holy Spirit. Therefore, key aspects of Christian faith and experience provide the building blocks for an understanding of God as the Trinity, one God in three persons:

- The belief in one true God.
- The conviction that Jesus is Lord and God.
- The experience of the personal indwelling of God, the Holy Spirit.

As we reread the Old Testament, we see an emphasis on the unity of God as ONE God, in contrast with religions who believed in a host of gods, like the Egyptians or Canaanites. However, within that Old Testament emphasis on ONE God, we see "inklings" – glimpses – of the Trinity.

Our one God is three Persons. As you read Genesis, note the role of the **Holy Spirit** in creation, and of the plural words God uses to describe Himself in creation. In Colossians, note the role of **Jesus** in creation.

We cannot "get our minds around" the mystery of the Trinity. How can God be one, yet reveal Himself in three persons? Part of the reason that I – who was skeptical of Christianity – do believe in the God of Scripture is that I cannot understand Him. If I, with my finite mind, could comprehend God, is He really worthy of my worship? As I become aware of how much greater God is than I am, I'm led to worship Him more deeply. Aware of my inability to comprehend God, I appreciate He is infinitely beyond me.

This week we'll focus on how appreciating God as Trinity helps us live wisely as followers of Way of Jesus. Theologian, educator, and author Marva Dawn, writes: *"What is worship? Let's begin by realizing that worship is our glad response to the immense grace of the Triune God. All of life is worship if we live it in gratitude and reverence, with mindfulness of God and eagerness to serve him."*

"In the Old Testament the name LORD is often entirely capitalized. This is the customary practice in English Bibles when the Hebrew word to be translated is the name YHWH, which is often vocalized [if it is vocalized; Orthodox Jews still do not say this name] as Yahweh [formerly as Jehovah] which is drawn from the verb root meaning 'to be.' That is the name by which the Lord revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14-15. It is a term that distinguishes him from all the neighbouring, false deities. He is not just any God, but he alone is the faithful covenant God, the great 'I AM.'

"That name gives us a special reason to worship, for it calls us to amazement at all the precious promises given by this Lord, to trust because this Lord is constantly faithful to his covenant, and to thankfulness for his deliverance of his people from all their captivities. When we worship, we sing to the Lord because of who God is – and God is so astounding that he deserves our worship whether we feel like offering it or not."

Our prayer today is attributed to Patrick, missionary to Ireland (Patrick was actually from Britain). It is a wonderful trinitarian prayer (here is a link to a musical version, "I Arise Today," by Irish singer, Lisa Kelly: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nr96YGWDGt4)

*I arise today, through a mighty strength,
the power of the Trinity,
Through the belief in the threeness,
through confession of the oneness
of the Creator of Creation.*

*I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth and his baptism,
Through the strength of his crucifixion and his burial,
Through the strength of his resurrection and his ascension.*

*I arise today through the strength of heaven:
Light of sun, radiance of moon,
splendor of fire, speed of lightning,
swiftness of wind, depth of sea,
stability of earth, firmness of rock.*

*I arise today through God's strength to pilot me:
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me from snares of devils,
From temptations of vices,
from everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and anear, alone and in multitude.*

*Christ to shield me today.
Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

*I arise today, through a mighty strength,
the power of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness,
through confession of the oneness,
of the Creator of Creation.*

Amen

Patrick (385-461)

Wednesday, September 13: John 1:1-18 (Knowing God, One-in-Three, Three-in-One)

Christians have tried to understand the mystery of how God is three-in-one and one-in-three by considering analogies from the natural world. One analogy suggests that, just as the one chemical formula H₂O can occur in three forms – ice, water, or steam – so also our one God is three persons. This analogy, however, falls short. Ice, water, and steam are simply three modes in which the same molecules could appear in different conditions. Father, Son, and Spirit, in contrast, are not three forms in which God appears under certain circumstances. God always exists as all three all the time. As helpful as analogies can be, they can only take us so far. We cannot comprehend God as Tri-unity. But we can declare some of who He is:

- **God is one.** The God whom we know through Jesus and the Spirit is the one God whom the Old Testament people called "Yahweh" ("the LORD" in most Bibles). There is no other God.
- **God is three.** This one God always has been, is, and will be three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three-in-oneness is also the way God acts in the world.
- **God is a diversity.** Our one God is a diversity-within-unity. Father, Son, and Spirit are unique and distinct in personhood and role, and yet work together in creation and redemption – uniquely, cooperatively, and complementarily. Oversimplifying things, we can think of the Father is the originator; the Son is the revealer; and the Spirit is the completer.
- **God is a unity.** Despite their varying activities, Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved in every area of God's activity in the world. The Father creates the world, through the Son, by the Spirit. Jesus, the Son, redeems us, yet it is the Father's will, empowered by the Spirit. Although the Spirit fills us today, the Father and Jesus guide us, gift us, and give us strength, as well.

How are you doing? Not sure you understand it? Good. It is a mystery. Vernon Grounds writes, *"Explain the Trinity? We can't even begin. We can only accept it – a mystery, disclosed in Scripture. It should be no surprise that the triune Being of God baffles our finite minds. We should be surprised, rather, if we could understand the nature of our Creator. He would be a two-bit deity, not the fathomless Source of all reality."*

Reflect on John 1:1-18 and this quote from Marva Dawn, today: *"Worship is for God. It centers on recognizing that 'great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised' and on responding to that worthiness by gathering with others to praise God, as is his due. If the community – and each of us as individuals in that body – focuses totally on the greatness of the Lord and his deserving to be praised, we will resist all idolatries of self, and comfort and ease, all divinizing of worship leaders, all sacralizing of our tastes and preferences, all gods of power and success."*

- What other things can we "worship" other than God?
- What else, besides God, can become the most important thing in our lives?
- What considerations are most important in your decision making?
- If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

"We can hardly even begin to appreciate the amazing grace of God's love," Dawn continues, "unless we first have known how much we definitely deserve instead our Judge's righteous wrath, how we incontrovertibly deserve the death we each must die. Without such proper 'fear,' we assume that it is easy [and merited] for God to forgive us. We nonchalantly think that were not too bad – that we could actually earn God's favor. We make grace cheap."

"When we totally confront our absolute hopelessness and complete depravity, however, we recognize with awe and trembling the nobility and immeasurability and incomprehensibility of God's love for us. God could at any moment ignore or destroy us; that is what we deserve. But the Lord does not; that is his grace. The Trinity's character is to remain faithful at all times, under all circumstances, to the divine covenant promises. Only with the constant intermingling of fear and love can we genuinely worship such a God."

Lord, help us make you the priority in our lives ...

*Our heavenly Father,
we pray that your blessing may rest on each one of us who profess to be Christians.
Lord, help us to love Christ more than we love ourselves.
Help us to be more like him in our way of life.
Help us, Lord, to walk humbly, prayerfully,
consistently on, in the dust of our pilgrimage.
May others not stumble over us and say,
"They profess only, but they never do anything."
God, through your Spirit,
help us to live up to what we profess, through you, in Christ Jesus.
May your Spirit be evident in each one of us.
Amen*

D.L. Moody (1837-1899)

Thursday, September 14: Isaiah 9:1-7 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Knowing God as Trinity)

These passages are prophetic statements about the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God the Father will reveal Himself more fully as Trinity through Jesus and the Spirit. How were these prophecies fulfilled?

Both prophecies were spoken into a context of human sinfulness. In Isaiah, the people of Judah have largely forgotten God. They focus on themselves, their personal interests, wealth, passions, freedoms, and "rights." God's call is back to a God-centred life and faithfulness.

In Jeremiah, as a result of the Jewish peoples' selfishness and sinfulness, they are in exile in Babylon. God will deliver His people. But, again, He calls them to a God-centred life and faithfulness. One of the recurring themes in the Bible is we need to recognize that we are not as good, smart, wise, powerful, or perfect as we like to think. We need to be humble before God. The mystery of the Trinity reminds us how little we really know about God (and life). We come, humbly, before God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Our challenge is to be humble before God, recognizing that

- We do not understand Him. He is so far beyond our finite minds.
- We are far from perfect beings. We have all sinned.
- We all need His forgiveness. Only He can forgive us.
- His grace and love are amazing, unconditional, and available to all.

Marva Dawn writes, *"One aspect of our faith that vaccinates us against idolatries is the biblical notion of 'fear', for the Lord is 'to be feared above all gods.' It seems to me that our postmodern times suffer from a lack of genuine 'fear' for God. I put the word 'fear' in quotation marks because its Old Testament usage does not signify 'terror,' nor does it connote simply awe and reverence. When biblical writers named 'the fear of the Lord' that is 'the beginning of wisdom,' they identified a profound realization of our unworthiness before God (and inability to comprehend God) so that we do not take God's gracious love and steadfast mercy for granted, as if we'd deserved it or could earn it or pay it back."*

"More than any other Christian doctrine," Stephen Seamands writes, *"the Trinity sets before us the mystery of God and points to the element of mystery in every aspect of our faith."* As we think about the amazing grace and love of God, we cannot grasp the mysteries of Jesus' birth. We don't know how His death paid the price for all our sins. We cannot understand the resurrection. We don't fully comprehend how the Spirit works in our lives. We have questions we cannot answer. We have doubts that linger. So what do we do?

Think about this analogy. I don't understand a lot of things – from how airplanes can fly to why dark chocolate tastes so good. But I still get on airplanes: I trust aerospace engineers, Boeing assembly people, airline service crews and pilots – all people I have never met and people as human as myself.

If I am willing to trust my life to human engineers, mechanics, and pilots, why would I not trust the Creator of the universe? I know from experience God gets me through hard times, why would I not trust Him now?

God, Creator,
Artist supreme,
The potter who forms us,
The father who keeps us,
The strength who holds us,
The word who sustains us,
The love who will not let us go,
We offer you our sacrifice of praise.

Jesus, Messiah,
Saviour and friend,
The rabbi who teaches us,
The prophet who stirs us,
The healer who touches us,
The One who dies for us,
The love who will not let us go,
We offer you our sacrifice of praise.

Spirit, Power,
Breath of Life,
The guide who prompts us,
The truth who inspires us,
The fire who empowers us,
The spirit who enables us,
The love who will not let us go,
We offer you our sacrifice of praise.
Amen.

John Birch

Friday, September 15: Psalm 96 (Knowing God, One-in-Three, Three-in-One)

We do not fully understand God, One-in-Three, Three-in-One. Truthfully, we cannot even **begin** to comprehend His mystery. He is infinitely beyond us. That wonder can move us to worship God more.

As you read Psalm 96, reflect on this quote: "*Some people come to worship in order to be entertained or to be made to feel good, to be comfortable, rather than to engage actively in worshipping God [which should sometimes make us experience anything but comfort!]. Closely related is the expectation that the worship leaders or preacher will offer us a good performance, instead of serving as stage managers who help all of **us** offer **our** best performance to God, who is the audience of our worship. Also, some churches resort to gimmicks or techniques, instead of relying on the truth of God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit.*

"We spend our lives choosing what pleases us, so it is decidedly countercultural to search instead for what pleases God. That is why it is critically important that our churches not foster such a church shopping disposition by offering choices of different kinds of worship services. Can we learn instead to be a body of diverse people, learning from each other's music how to praise God more fully? (What do you think?)

*"In a culture awash in sacralizations of nations, money, power, prestige, possessions, technology, toys, sexual 'freedom,' and self, Christians completely require the Lord's greatness to withstand, and abstain from, and counter them. The Scriptures we read in worship continue to **expose** these gods by publicly displaying them; the sermons of the preacher can equip parishioners to **disarm** them; the power of the Holy Spirit, with which worship fills us, enables us to **triumph** over them. [These three verbs come from the pattern of Christ's victory over the principalities and powers as described in Colossians 2.] Other elements of the worship service provide other forms of conquest over the powers of idolatry. Giving a monetary offering, for example, continually defeats Mammon (money)" [Marva Dawn]. How do you respond?*

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Trinity is that *"In the deepest mystery of his being, God is an*

intimate relationship, a fellowship, a community of love" (Darrell Johnson). Somehow the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit get along perfectly. No hint of any problems. No conflict. Perfect harmony. They model for us the "house of love" we would all love to live in.

How can we live in a "fellowship, a community of love" with one another?

Jesus says, *"The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel. The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'"* He goes on, *"The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Mark 12:29-31)

How can I learn to be part of a body of diverse people, learning from others how to praise God more fully?
How can I put others' needs before my own? How can I love my neighbour?

*Creator God, we glimpse your beauty
in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing.
We sense your power in thunder crash,
lightning flash and ocean's roar.
Creator God we praise you.*

*Precious Jesus, we see your love
stretched out upon a cruel cross.
We stand in awe at your sacrifice,
pure love poured out for humankind.
Precious Jesus we praise you.*

*Holy Spirit, we see your power
in lives transformed, hearts on fire.
We listen for your still, small voice,
comforting, guiding, calling.
Holy Spirit we praise you.*

Amen

John Birch

Saturday, September 16: John 14:1-14 (Knowing God, One-in-Three, Three-in-One)

Frank Doyle writes, *"John quotes a curious remark of Philip to Jesus: 'Show us the Father and we will be satisfied.' It reminds me of what I have often heard on the lips of exasperated parents to their children: 'You're never satisfied.' Am I ever? Augustine said our hearts are restless till they rest in God. When I see Jesus, I see a human vision of the Infinite God who is beyond my imagination."*

We all have difficulty understanding God. Our finite minds struggle to make sense of an invisible being with the power to create the universe. Jesus shows us how to understand God, not by long abstract theological lectures, but by showing us who God is. God is the One who loves, heals, rebukes, challenges, models perfect holiness, calms storms, heals people, and raises the dead. Reading the stories of Jesus and listening to the teaching of Jesus we discover who God – Father, Son, and Spirit – **really** is.

How can we know God? How can mortals like us relate to Almighty God? How can sinful people like us relate to a holy God? How can we know the Creator, who we cannot see or touch? It seems impossible. Jesus makes it possible for us to know God. By coming among us, Jesus, fully God and fully human, reveals God to us and brings us into relationship with Him. Only Jesus can bring us into fellowship with God (14:6).

We are invited to come to God and know God by believing in Jesus and what Jesus says. We invite His Spirit to lead us, guide us, teach us, and heal us. We trust our lives to him. Trust may be hard, especially when Christian faith is difficult in 2023. But Jesus invites us to hang on and take a long-term view (14:1-4).

When we think about the mystery of the Trinity, *"it is not an invitation to theological speculation about three*

persons in one God. Rather it recalls the experience of Jesus, our brother. He spoke of himself as a beloved son, as one who does not send himself but is sent on a mission, and as being joined by the Holy Spirit to the Father. We too, sisters and brothers of Jesus, are sent into this world with a purpose, we are God's beloved children, and we are joined to God by the Holy Spirit – we are temples of the Spirit. Already we are living in the life of the Trinity”(Frank Doyle).

We are commissioned with a purpose, to be the “image of God” in creation. Now, we love as He loved. We care as He cared. We teach as He taught. We share as He shared. We welcome as He welcomed.

*Creator God,
you who love us more than we can know,
who chose us from the very beginning to be family,
we praise your holy name.*

*Jesus Christ,
Son of God, Word become flesh,
who dwelt among us and was sacrificed for us,
we praise your holy name.*

*Holy Spirit,
present and power in our lives,
from the moment that we first believed,
we praise your holy name.
Amen*

John Birch

Sunday, September 17: Psalm 102 (Knowing God)

A Scripture Union devotional author writes, *“Three years ago this month my doctor told me I had cancer. I was 47. Many things went through my head of course. One of them was that I almost certainly won't live as long as I had been expecting to. I found myself saying, with the psalmist, 'Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days' (v 24). I understand what this man means when he says, 'I forget to eat my food' (v 4). And just like him I often 'lie awake' (v 7). Those are common symptoms of depression.*

“I'm hopeful that my cancer will be cured. I'm hopeful that I will live a long time yet. I'm praying for both of those things. But I can't be sure they will happen.

“There are some things that I do know for sure. In fact, I know these things more surely than I did before I had cancer. I know them because God has promised them:

- *I know that God hears people who call when they are in trouble (v 17).*
- *I know that God's plan extends throughout all generations, so that my children's children will live in God's presence (v 28).*
- *I know that the Lord will complete the building of his kingdom, and that we will one day see God's glory fully revealed (v 16).*

And that's enough.”

Thank God for what you know for sure. Reflect on what we have been learning about God this week. How can this encourage you through your tough times?

*Lord, who though you were rich, yet for our sakes you became poor.
You promise in your holy Gospel
that whatever is done for the least of your brothers you will receive as done to you.
Give us grace, we humbly ask you,
to be always ready and willing to minister to the needs of others.
Help us extend the blessings of your kingdom over all the world.
Amen*

Augustine (354-430)

Monday, September 18: Psalm 103 (Knowing God as God our loving Father)

Wouldn't life have been/be better if your parents were perfect? As a parent, wouldn't it be great if I were the perfect parent? Unfortunately, our human-ness, imperfect knowledge, accident prone-ness, inherent ornery-ness, and outright sinfulness make that impossible. We fail, as our parents failed before us.

We often talk about Jesus. We talk about the Holy Spirit. But we don't really know what to do with God the Father. Some of us think of God the Father as the stereotypical God of the Old Testament, a God who makes us uncomfortable: judgy, harsh, even cruel. Jesus seems kinder and gentler. But it is good for us to get to know our three-in-one God in all His fullness. This week we'll look specifically at God the Father.

God as "Father" is a challenging concept for some people who did not have good relationships with their human parents, especially their fathers.

As we reflect on God as our Father we are, of course, thinking about fatherhood/parenthood in its ideal, God-created sense. God is the perfection of parenthood. He is the model of what a perfect parent ought to be. Every parent is encouraged to be more and more like God. We all fall short.

As the perfect Father/Parent, we can celebrate that:

1. Our loving Father is the One who created us, called us into being, and gives us life (Psalm 139). We are each His creations – unique, precious, and divinely called. Søren Kierkegaard prays, *"Father in Heaven, when the thought of you wakes in our hearts let it not awaken like a frightened bird that flies about in dismay, but like a child waking from its sleep with a heavenly smile."* Isn't that a wonderful way to relate to God?
2. Our Father loves us as His precious children, not because we've earned His love, are perfect, or deserve His blessing. God loves each one of us unconditionally because He individually fashioned each of us and brought us into being ([Psalm 139](#)). Nothing can break that bond of perfect love our Father has for us (Jesus emphasizes this in the parable of prodigal sons [[Luke 15:11-32](#)]).
3. We can pray to our Father. The [Lord's Prayer](#) is addressed to *"Our Father ..."* We are not only **welcome** to pray directly to God, this is a **good** thing to do. We are encouraged to talk with Him. We can come to our loving Father with our problems, joys, needs, thanks, issues, and celebrations. He delights in time we spend with Him. Jesus goes on to note that, as children, we don't always pray for what is best for ourselves, but, as the perfect loving Parent, God will always do what is best for us ([Matthew 7:7-11](#)). Sometimes our requests reflect our own immaturity, self-centredness, or lack of understanding of the 'big picture.' We can trust God, our Father, really does know best.

As you read through Psalm 103, reflect on God as your perfect Father. He is the One to whom you can come, anytime, with whatever is on your heart or mind. You are always loved and always welcome. You can be confident He knows what is best for you. He always has time for you. He always listens to you. Nothing you can say can make Him love you less. Nothing can cause His love for you to cease.

Frank Doyle writes, *"John Calvin says somewhere that each of us is an actor on a stage and God is the audience. The audience is not there to judge the actors, but to enjoy them. This image suggests that God might actually enjoy us, not in any simple sense, of course, but as you enjoy the being of a child even when he is in every way a thorn in your heart. It is another way of suggesting that God looks on us with love: the Prodigal Son's father, scanning the horizon from his window, sees a forlorn, debauched figure slouching towards home, and runs out to meet him, speechless with joy."*

- What do you need to talk with God about today?
- Who do you know who really struggles with their relationship with God. Pray for that person, too.

*Father Almighty,
 creator of everything and the source of all that is good and satisfying,
 help us to be more devoted to you
 with all that we are and with all that we have.
 Forgive my wandering, lustful heart
 that is always looking for something else to quench its insatiable thirst.
 What I really desire is the grace to be more devoted to you and your Word.
 I have a "God-shaped" hole that can only be filled
 by you and your Spirit.
 Let me be wholly set apart from all that desecrates,
 and consecrate both my inner and outer life,
 my possessions, relationships, and career,
 to the cause of Christ and his Kingdom.
 I pray that the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, meditation,
 fasting, good works, solitude, and corporate worship
 will be pleasing in your sight as I go deeper in your love.
 Amen.*

James Bell Jr.

Tuesday, September 19: Genesis 2:7, Ezekiel 37:1-14 (Knowing God as our Father)

We cannot see God, touch God, smell God, or taste God. We struggle to hear God. It's hard to talk with God. It's all rather frustrating. "*God is Spirit*" says Jesus (John 4:24). What does that mean? How do we deal with our loving Father, whom we cannot relate to with our senses the way we do with other people?

"*Spirit*" is a complicated word in Hebrew. The Hebrew word "*ruach*" is translated by at least three English words: "*wind*," "*breath*," and "*spirit*." So, when we read any one of those three words in our English Bibles, it could be translated by either of the other two words. A translator made a judgment call.

1. **God the Father, as Spirit, gives life.** When "*the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground, He **breathed** the **breath** of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person*" (Genesis 2:7). The difference between a living person and a dead person is that living people have breath. In a much deeper sense, God is able to give individuals and churches life, by breathing His breath (His Spirit) into them, just like He does to a valley of bones in [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#).
2. **God, the Father, as Spirit, is a God of power.** "*Ruach*" also means "*wind*." In southern Alberta, we cannot see the wind directly, but we can feel its power. We sure know the wind by its effects. God is like the wind, an unseen force who acts upon things and people. While we cannot see Him, we can see His effect in our lives, our church, and our world. What evidence do you see of God's power in your life and your world?
3. **God, the Father, as Spirit, gets things going.** Have you ever tried to light a campfire and you can't get the flame to catch? But if you get a few embers glowing, then gently blow on them, suddenly, the fire takes off. Your breath brings the fire to life. That fire has the potential to bless us with warmth and light. God breathes life into our faith to bring us to life and sets us on fire, with love for Him and love for those around us. We can be ambassadors of His love and light.
4. **God, the Father, as Spirit, brings refreshment.** In the Bible, the west wind ("*ruach*") brought rain to arid lands, resulting in life bursting forth from the ground ([Hosea 6:3](#)). In the same way, our Father brings refreshment to our dry, weary souls, when we open our lives to receive His love.

In John 3:5-8, Jesus says, "*I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the 'ruach' (Spirit/wind/breath). Humans can reproduce only human life, but what is born of the 'ruach' (Spirit/wind/breath) is 'ruach' (Spirit/wind/breath). So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The 'ruach' (Spirit/wind/breath) blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the 'ruach' (Spirit/wind/breath) but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people*

are born of the 'ruach' (Spirit/wind/breath).” We can have life – true life – when God comes into our lives.

- Pray for God to breathe His life/breath/Spirit into you.
- Pray for God to breathe His life/breath/Spirit into our church.
- Pray that spark of faith in your life will be fanned into a burning fire of love for God and others.
- Is there someone whose faith is sputtering, whom you can encourage and inspire?

*God of love, we pray that you give us love.
Love in our thinking.
Love in our speaking.
Love in our doing.
And Love in the hidden places of our souls.
Love of our neighbours, near and far.
Love of our friends, old and new.
Love of those who we find it hard to bear.
And Love of those who find it hard to bear with us.
Love of those with whom we work.
And Love of those with whom we take our ease.
Love in joy. Love in sorrow.
Love in life. And Love in death.
In the end, may we be worthy to dwell with you, who are eternal Love –
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – forever and ever.
Amen.*

William Temple (1881-1944)

Wednesday, September 20: Psalm 23, John 10:1-18 (Knowing God as our Father)

One of the most familiar images of God the Father comes from Psalm 23:1 – *"The Lord is my shepherd."* The words are familiar. But in 2023, few of us know much about shepherds.

Think about some of the implications of this image for our lives:

1. ***The shepherd is dedicated to his sheep.*** A shepherd often became an outcast in society because he spent all his time with and committed to his flock. God, our loving Father, is committed to us, too. He goes after us, even when we wander away from him ([Luke 15:3-7](#)). He will even sacrifice Himself ([John 10:11-16](#)). That is what a good shepherd – and a great Father – does.
2. ***The shepherd knows where food, water, and safety are found. He guides his sheep to them.*** He knows where the green pastures and quiet waters are. He leads his sheep there. God, our Father, is always with us, too. Through guidance, correction, and care He will lead us from potential dangers and guide us to safety and refreshment ([Isaiah 40:11](#)). We do have to follow.
3. ***We are the sheep of our Father's pasture*** ([Psalm 79:13](#), [95:7](#), [100:3](#)). He cares for each of us passionately. But, like sheep, we find it easy to wander off and get ourselves in trouble. We are not self-sufficient (although we like to think so). We do so much better when we listen to His voice and follow His commands. *"All of us, like sheep, have strayed away; we have left God's paths to follow our own"* (Isaiah 53:6) is an apt summary of our human natures. As a passionate and loving Father, God always seeks to bring us back into the safety and blessing of His fold. He never gives up on us. He will never NOT welcome us home.
4. ***Our Father God, the Good Shepherd, does not just point us in the direction of the quiet waters and green pastures – He takes us there,*** even carrying those too weak to make it alone (Isaiah 40:11). God does not just give us commands and directions, point us along the path, and then leave us to make it on our own. As a loving Father, He travels with us, guiding us, supporting us, and caring for us. Even through the darkest valleys, He never leaves us. *"Seek to cultivate a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your daily life"* (Alexander McLaren).

Our loving heavenly Father cares so much for us that He gave His own Son, Jesus, as our Saviour. Amazing.

If you are a parent, how does God's perfect parenthood and shepherding challenge and inspire you?

We are all encouraged to help others know God and grow in their faith. We can be God's presence to people, helping them find those quiet waters and green pastures of God's presence, walking with them through their dark valleys, comforting, and encouraging them. Who can you encourage today?

*God, whose I am, have mercy on me.
Have mercy on me so that, in love and faith,
in righteousness and humility,
I may follow You with self-denial,
steadfastness,
and courage.
May I meet with You in the silence.
Please give me a pure heart that I may see You,
a humble heart that I may hear You,
A heart of love so I may serve You,
and a heart of faith so I may live in You.
Amen.*

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961)

Thursday, September 21: Psalm 130 (Knowing God as our Father)

There's a storm. It's dark. The power is out. It's cold. It's wet. You hear every strange creak and bump. It's frightening. You huddle close to the fire (if you have a real fireplace) and wait for the morning. When the light begins to dawn, and the sun peeks over the horizon – wow! Suddenly everything is better. This is the situation the psalmist is describing in Psalm 130. After a long dark night on sentry duty in an age long before electric lights, dawn is so welcome. So warm. So comforting. It is a new day.

- **"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all"** (1 John 1:5).
- **"The LORD is my light and my salvation – so why should I be afraid?"** (Psalm 27:1).
- **"For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light"** (Psalm 104:13).

The image of **God, the Father, as light** runs throughout the Bible.

1. **God, our Father, as light, shows things as they really are.** I remember eating in a restaurant. In the dim evening light, it seemed nice. The next day, I went back for something I'd forgotten. In daylight, the restaurant was grubby and worn. Light revealed the truth. **"The LORD's light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive"** (Proverbs 20:27). God's light shows:
 - a. **The good.** The world celebrates the powerful, glamorous, and wealthy. God celebrates the loving, compassionate, peacemakers, and those who bring justice, care, and mercy. God helps us recognize the truly "good" ones – the Mother Teresas, Desmond Tutus, and ordinary, anonymous saints who simply do what is right, day in and day out.
 - b. **The bad.** In a world where what is wrong for me may not necessarily be wrong for you, God exposes the myth of relativism. There are basic moral principles which, if we follow them, help life go well, but which, if we flaunt them, cause grief for us and others.
 - c. **The possibilities.** Is there hope? Do I have a future? A purpose? Absolutely. God shows us we are all made in His image and are called to be His light, shining in the darkness.
2. **God, our Father, as light, helps us find our way.** Years ago, several of us went camping at Long Beach, Vancouver Island. We parked at 11 p.m. With flashlights, we hiked several kilometres through the dense rainforest, to the campground on the beach. We got lost a few times. Eventually

we made it. Without lights we would never have got there. "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path," the psalmist says (Psalm 119:105). "You light a lamp for me. The LORD, my God, lights up my darkness" (Psalm 18:28). I need to follow the path He shows me.

3. **God, our Father, as light, brings hope to a new day.** Before Jesus, people looked forward to the dawn of a new day when the Messiah/Saviour would come. For instance, Malachi looks forward to a time when God will come to visit and save His people: "The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays" (This verse, Malachi 4:2, is famous in "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing": "Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace / Hail, the Sun of Righteousness. / Light and life to all He brings / Ris'n with healing in His wings." Charles Wesley, who wrote the carol, chose rhyme over accuracy in his lyrics substituting "wings" for "rays." His version makes little sense, but rhymes better). "The people walking in darkness," says Isaiah, "shall see a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light shall dawn" (Isaiah 9:2). Psalm 130 reminds us God is the light whom we trust for our new day, an eternal life with Him.

Jesus Himself, will say, "**I am the Light of the world**" (John 8:12), continuing His Father's mission to bring light into a dark world.

One thing that helped my friends and I get to our campsite that crazy night on Vancouver Island was the moon. It was almost a full moon that night. The moon is not nearly as bright as the sun; it certainly doesn't show up all the fallen logs or help illuminate the trail as well as the sun does. But it helps. The moon has no light of its own. It is just a lifeless, barren, cold rock. Its light comes from reflecting the light of the sun.

We are challenged to be the "light of the world," too ([Matthew 5:14-16](#)). Like the moon, as followers of Jesus, we do not produce our own light. As *lights shining in the world*, we are simply reflecting the *true Light of the World, Jesus*. We are invited to know the love, grace, peace, joy, and hope of God, and then reflect that love, grace, peace, joy, and hope in a dark world. Of course, we will be imperfect and not do as good a job of this as we might like, but we still shine the light of Jesus' love as well as we can.

Ultimately, we are just reflections of Someone much greater. How can we help people see the true Light?

*Lord, I make you a present of myself.
I do not know what to do with myself.
So let me make this exchange:
I will place myself entirely in your hands,
if you will cover my ugliness with your beauty,
and tame my unruliness with your love.
Put out the flames of false passion in my heart,
since these flames destroy all that is true within me.
Make me always busy in your service.
Lord, I want no special signs,
nor am I looking for intense emotions in response to your love.
I would rather be free of all emotion than to run the danger
of falling victim once again to false passion.
All I am, I give to you.
Amen.*

Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

Friday, September 22: Psalm 18 (or just 1-3, 25-31, 46-50) (Knowing God as our Father)

- "The LORD is my **rock**, fortress, and savior; my God is my **rock**, in whom I find protection" (18:2)
- "For who is God except the LORD? Who but our God is a solid **rock**?" (18:31)
- "The LORD lives. Praise to my **Rock**. May the God of my salvation be exalted." (18:46)

As a geographer, I love rocks. Especially when they are formed by God into mountains. The image of God

as a solid rock, who we can depend on and who will protect us, is common in Scripture. As you read Psalm 18, notice all the various images used to celebrate God's rock-solid strength, protection, and guidance.

1. **God, our Father, our rock, is a secure foundation on which to build our lives.** Jesus reminds us we can build our lives on sand (easily swept away) or rock (enduring the storms of life) in [Matthew 7:24-27](#). The God who created the universe is the solid rock upon which we should build our lives. If we believe God is our solid rock, then we should live like it. The vagaries and emptiness of contemporary ethics and philosophical speculation leave us with nothing firm to deal with the big questions of life, choices, death, and hereafter. God does.
2. **God, our Father, our rock, provides protection and security.** Do you remember when you were learning to swim and got into water a bit too deep? The desperate panic of not being able to touch bottom? And the incredible relief when your toes finally found something solid to stand on? In a confusing, challenging, stressful world, we don't have to go it alone. God is the solid rock upon whom we can always depend. He never leaves us. He never lets us down.
3. **God, our Father, our rock, never changes.** Everything seems to change quickly these days. I cannot keep up with the latest technology, news, economic upheavals, natural disasters, or my own changing health. What can I depend on? What doesn't change? Our loving, heavenly Father is rock solid. *"Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow"*(James 1:17). Theologian J.I. Packer writes, *"Nothing can alter the character of God. In the course of a human life, tastes and outlook and temper may change radically: a kind, equable man may turn bitter and crotchety: a man of good-will may grow cynical and callous. But nothing of this sort happens to the Creator. He never becomes less truthful, or merciful, or just, or good, than He used to be."*

People are searching for something solid to believe in. For someone dependable in whom to trust. For a conviction to base their lives on. For a foundation that is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Only God, revealed to us in Jesus, is that unchanging solid rock in whom we can trust ([Hebrews 13:8](#)).

We have the good news of God's amazing love for every person and the whole world. We have the solid rock of truth folks desperately need. How can we share this with others?

As we turn to God in our difficult times, we model that faith and trust for others. Don't be afraid to tell someone today about how God is your *"rock, fortress, and savior ... yesterday, today, and forever."*

*Lord, I am an empty vessel needing to be filled.
My Lord, fill me.
At times I doubt and I am unable to trust You.
Reassure and comfort me.
I am weak in faith.
Strengthen and teach me.
I am cold in love.
Warm me and make me passionate,
so my love may go out to my neighbour, in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Saturday, September 23: Psalm 86 (Knowing God as our Father)

An elementary school student was asked what God is like. The boy replied that, as far as he could make out, God was *"the sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it"*(C.S. Lewis). Is that your image of God? Is God a dour, grumpy, scowling old man? Is He reminiscent of Pharaoh, a power-hungry slave driver? Is He a frowning judge in a powdered wig? What is God like? Have the past few days helped you think about Him differently?

David tells us who God really is: "O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help" (86:5). **Fundamentally, God, our Father – like the entire Trinity – is love.** He is so good. So ready to forgive. So willing to help. So entirely defined by "love."

"God is love," writes, John, "God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." (1 John 4:8-10)

The essence of God – three-in-one – is love. Father-Son-Spirit are a wonderful team who model perfect love, perfect unity, and wonderful synchronicity. And their desire is that **we** have a perfect relationship:

- Of love with Themselves. Jesus came to restore that perfect relationship with God so that we might enjoy His love and be part of the amazing community of His family, the church.
- Of love with one another. "Dear friends," John continues, "since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us" (1 John 4:11-12).
- and with all of God's creation.

"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect (1 John 4:16-17). Isn't that profound?

How can we continue to grow in our experience of God's love? Even when we go through the most difficult of times, God is with us as our loving heavenly Father, as our Saviour, and as the Holy Spirit ...

How can we share this love with others? To whom can I show the love of God?

*You are holy, Lord, the only God, and your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong.
You are great.
You are the most high.
You are Almighty.
You, holy Father, are King of Heaven and Earth.
You are three and one, Lord God.
You are good, all good, supreme good, Lord God, living and true.
You are love.
You are wisdom.
You are humility.
You are endurance.
You are rest.
You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and moderation.
You are all our riches, and you suffice for us.
You are beauty.
You are gentleness.
You are our protector.
You are our guardian and defender.
You are our courage.
You are our haven and our hope.
You are our faith, our great consolation.
You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord, God Almighty, merciful Savior.
Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

Sunday, September 24: Mark 1:1-15 and Mark 8:27-29 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

Two weeks ago, we reflected on how knowing God as Trinity helps us worship God more meaningfully. Last week we thought about God, our loving heavenly Father. This week we will focus on Jesus, fully God and fully human. As we understand Jesus better, we also understand His good news better.

Mark begins his gospel: "*Jesus came proclaiming the **good news** of God: 'The time has come,' Jesus said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the **good news**'*" (Mark 1:14-15). What good news is this? What good news do we have for our world? Our community? Our family? Ourselves?

Later, Jesus stuns His disciples by asking them, "*Who do people say I am?*" The disciples stutter back, "*Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.*" Jesus persists: "*But what about **you**? Who do **you** say I am?*" Peter burst forth with, "*You are the 'Messiah'*" (Hebrew for the Greek, "*Christ*," English, "*Anointed One*" – the Saviour promised in the Old Testament) (Mark 8:27-29).

Our good news is that Jesus is God-with-us, the Messiah. In love, God has come to us. Stan Grenz, late professor at Carey Theological College, writes, "*Peter's Spirit-inspired confession lies at the heart of our faith as well. With believers of all ages, we acknowledge that God has acted in this specific human life. Echoing Matthew, who saw in the birth of our Lord the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, we declare that Jesus of Nazareth is 'Immanuel' – 'God with us.'* This lofty declaration, '*Jesus is the Messiah, (or 'Christ')*' is a central element in every Christian's religious vocabulary. *We readily let the statement roll from our tongues.*

- *But what do we mean when we confess that God was in Jesus?*
- *Does our confession remain intelligible two millennia after Jesus' death?*
- *And if so, how are we to understand Jesus' identity in our context?*
- *How should we answer the question 'Who is Jesus?' in the contemporary world in which we live?*
- *And what difference does it make in how we live?"*

Who do **you** say that Jesus is? Why? How would you answer? Perhaps the most penetrating question is Grenz's final one: **What difference does Jesus make in how you live?** How can Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us, be "good news" for us, today?

*Christ Jesus,
when all is darkness and I feel my weakness and helplessness,
Give me the sense of your presence,
your love,
and your strength.
Help me to have perfect trust in your protecting love and strengthening power,
so that nothing may frighten or worry me,
For, living close to You, I shall see your hand,
your purpose,
and your will through all things.
Amen.*

Irenaeus (130-200)

Monday, September 25: Hebrews 1-2 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

Who is Jesus? Yesterday we heard Jesus ask His disciples, "*Who do people say I am?*" They mirror some of the confusion of their time: "*Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.*" "*But what about **you**?*" Jesus pushes them, "*Who do **you** say I am?*" And Peter exclaims, "*You are the 'Messiah,'*" the promised Saviour/Christ from the Old Testament (Mark 8:27-29).

In Hebrews 1 and 2, the author tries to explain who Jesus is. In Chapter 1, **Jesus is the Son of God**, not one of many angels. There were some in the early church who thought Jesus was a special sort of angel. The writer of Hebrews emphasizes Jesus is completely different than angels, created beings. Just as the

child of any person is of the same essence as their parent, as the "Son of God," Jesus is fully God.

In Chapter 2, the author emphasizes **Jesus is also completely human**. Jesus is the One who walked where we walk, lived as we live, struggled as we struggle, hurt as we hurt, loved as we love, laughed as we laugh, and cried as we cried. He has even died the death we will die. **And** He has been raised from the dead as we will be raised from the dead. "*Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested*" (2:18). That is great news.

The writer goes on to talk about how Jesus fulfills more and more of the old Jewish prophecies and visions of the Messiah. He is fully God and fully human. He is our great High Priest. In Old Testament Judaism, the role of the High Priest was a two-way street:

- He is the one who **brings God's grace and forgiveness to the people**, and
- He intercedes **on behalf of the people to God**.

Jesus does both, perfectly, for us. He brings God and His love to us. And He brings us to God.

The writer ends, "*So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*" (Hebrews 4:14-16)

*Jesus, shine the light of your radiance upon us.
Let peace rule in our hearts.
May your love be our strength and our song, throughout our pilgrimage.
We commit ourselves to your care and keeping this day.
Let your grace be mighty in us.
Let your grace be sufficient for us.
Let your grace work in us
both to will and to do what is right and pleasing to you.
GIVE us strength for all the duties of the day.
Keep us from sin.
May your Spirit rule over our own spirits.
Keep us from speaking unadvisedly with our words.
May we live together in peace and holy love.
Grant us your blessing, which is eternal life.
Prepare us for all the events of the day,
for we do not know what a day may bring forth.
Give us grace to deny ourselves;
to take up our cross daily,
and to follow in your steps, our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

Tuesday, September 26: Colossians 1:1-23 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

"*Thank you.*" Those are words we all love to hear. They are words we aren't always good at saying.

Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae is all about saying, "*Thank you.*" Paul begins by thanking God that there is a church in Colossae at all (1:3). As Paul prays for the people, he prays they will be thankful for all God's blessings, too (1:12). Paul's message is all about Jesus. And being thankful: "*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with **thankful** hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving **thanks** through him to God the Father.*" (3:16-17)

What can they be thankful for?

- *"Jesus has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins" (1:13-14).*
- *"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross" (2:13-15).*

In Colossians 1:15-20, Paul reminds us who Jesus is. It is worth reading these verses several times. It is an incredible vision of Jesus.

- He is the visible image of the invisible God. God in all his fullness lives in Christ.
- He is Co-Creator of all things. With the Father, He has created things we can and can't see.
- He is supreme Ruler over all creation.
- He is the head of the church, which is His body.
- He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead.
- Through Him, God reconciled everything in heaven and on earth to Himself.

We need fear no evil, no powers of darkness, no condemnation for our sins, and no suffering, because the Creator and King of all of Creation is our constant Companion and Saviour. He has definitively defeated evil and death on the cross. Difficult times may come, and hardships may happen, but we can overcome them all through the strength and presence of the One who is with us. In the end, God wins. Period.

Who is Jesus? He is the Creator. He is the King. Our challenge is to live as people of victory. *"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. **Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be **thankful**"*** (3:12-15).

*Lord Jesus, teach us, we pray,
to ask you in the right way for the right blessings.
Please steer the ship of our lives towards yourself,
the tranquil haven of all storm-tossed souls.
Show us the course in which we should go.
Renew a willing spirit within us.
Let your Spirit curb our wayward senses,
and guide and enable us toward that which is our true good.
Help us keep your laws.
In all we do, help us rejoice in your glorious and gladdening presence.
For yours is the glory and praise from all your saints, forever and ever.
Amen.*

Basil of Caesarea (330-379)

Wednesday, September 27: Matthew 1:18-23 and 28:16-20 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

Who is Jesus? Matthew 1:1-17 gives us Jesus' family tree. Other people's family trees can be as interesting as watching paint dry. The only time one's pedigree is interesting is if it matters. For instance, if a person is the heir to some vast fortune.

In Jesus' case, family lineage does matter. Look back to the beginning of Jesus' ancestors: Abraham. God gave Abraham this promise: *"I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others ... All the families on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2-3). Later, the Lord says to Abraham: *"Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have."* (Genesis 15:5). Jesus is the heir to these incredible promises.

Jesus' family tree has royalty in it, too: David, Solomon, and their heirs. Jesus is the heir of kings.

Jesus has an amazing inheritance. He will be God's anointed eternal King through whom all families on earth will be blessed. His family (His church) will be as uncountable as the stars in the sky.

Ultimately the judges and kings of Israel *were supposed to be* godly rulers who carried on Abraham's mission of bringing God's blessing to all people. But they limited God's grace to the Jews. And they failed God time and time again by their sinfulness, selfishness, greed, and refusal to worship God alone. These earthly kings never lived up to Abraham's promise. Like each of us, they all fell far short.

Now, Jesus, the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords has come to fulfill those promises:

- The name "*Jesus*" means "*YHWH saves*" (1:21). Jesus delivers us from the punishment we deserve for our sinfulness. One of the great blessings Jesus offers to all people is the forgiveness of our sin, if we accept His gift. He has won the victory over the power of sin, evil, and death. "*I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth*" (Matthew 28:18).
- The name "*Immanuel*" means "*God with us*" (Matthew 1:23). Another great blessing Jesus offers is He continues to be with us through His Holy Spirit. "*Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20).

(Linguistic note: The name "Jesus," meaning "YHWH saves," refers to the Hebrew name of God uses for Himself, literally meaning "I am" (see [Exodus 3:1-15](#)). This name was so holy Jews would not pronounce it. When they were reading Scripture and came across that word, they would say "Adonai" which means "Lord." In most Bibles, when you see a capitalized "LORD" it is the word "YHWH" ("I am"). Properly, it would have been pronounced "Yahweh" in Hebrew. When some Christians chose to write this name, they took the letters of God's name "YHWH" and added the vowel sounds of "Adonai" to make "Yahowah" or "Jehovah." "Jehovah" is an artificial, hybrid word invented in the 16th century by translator, William Tyndale.)

Who is Jesus? He has come as a blessing for all people – as Saviour, Comforter, and King – God-with-us.

As people created in God's image, His ambassadors, we are to be a blessing to all people, too: "*Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you*" (28:19-20). We have good news about God's love to share with our friends, neighbours, and families.

*My soul's desire is to see the face of God,
and to rest in his house.
In Jesus, I see His face.
My soul's desire is to study the Scriptures,
and to learn the ways of God.
In Jesus, I learn His ways.
My soul's desire is to be freed from all fear and sadness,
and to share Christ's risen life.
In Jesus, I overcome all evils.
My soul's desire is to imitate my king,
and to sing his praise always.
In Jesus, I praise His name.
My soul's desire is to enter the gates of heaven,
and to gaze upon the light that shines forever.
Dear Lord, you alone know what my soul truly desires.
You alone can satisfy those desires.
In Jesus, my life is made whole and complete.
Amen.*

Celtic prayer

Thursday, September 28: John 1:1-18 and John 21:15-19 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

While Matthew emphasizes Jesus' earthly pedigree, John chooses to emphasize Jesus' divine identity. Jesus is God Himself, in all His glory come among us. Jesus is:

- God, the Creator Himself, become human among us.
- The One who gives life and light to everyone.
- The One who gives us a new status. We are now children of God.
- He is full of unfailing love and faithfulness.
- The One who, from his abundance, blesses us with one gracious blessing after another, including God's unfailing love and faithfulness.

"No one has ever seen God," John muses. "But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us" (1:18). Who is Jesus? He is God among us as a human being.

John records some wonderful stories of how Jesus does show us God's love, including:

- Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus, in which He talks about being born again and gives us the familiar summary of His good news: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)
- Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well: "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." (John 4:13-14)
- Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead: "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die." (John 11:25-26)
- Jesus reinstating Peter, after Peter had denied Him three times, through a threefold process of commissioning Peter as His servant ([John 21:15-19](#)). Peter failed Jesus miserably. Yet Jesus still loved Peter, believed in him, and valued what he could contribute to His Kingdom.

Who is Jesus? He is God, Himself, loving, restoring, and empowering us to be His beloved children.

Jesus says to all of us, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). We have amazing good news of God's love, forgiveness, presence, and eternal life now and hereafter.

*My Jesus, my God,
I believe most firmly that you watch over all who hope in you.
We need nothing when we rely upon you in all things.
Therefore, I am resolved to cast all my cares upon you.
People may deprive me of worldly goods and status.
Sickness may take from me my strength and the means of serving you.
I may even jeopardize our relationship by sin,
but my trust in Jesus shall never leave me.
I will persevere in faith to the last moment of my life.
Let others seek happiness in their wealth and in their talents.
Let them trust in the purity of their lives,
in the severity of their sacrifices,
in the number of their good works,
and in the enthusiasm of their prayers.
As for me, confidence in you, my rock and my refuge, fills me with hope.
For you, my divine protector, give me hope.
My hope is in Jesus. Only in Jesus.
Amen.*

Claude de la Colombiere (1641-1682)

Friday, September 29: Mark 10:35-52 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

Tom Wright asks, *"Do you know how a fox get rid of its fleas?"* A fox goes along the hedgerow and collects little bits of sheep's wool. Then he makes it into a ball of wool, which he holds in his mouth. Then he goes into a stream, and slowly, slowly walks down into the water. The fleas move for higher ground – the ball of wool in his mouth. The fox lowers himself right down into the water, with the ball of wool in his mouth, until at last he is totally submerged and only the ball of wool is above the water. Then he lets go, and the ball of wool floats away downstream, carrying all the fleas with it. The fox emerges, flea-free.

"In this image, Jesus is the ball of wool," observes Wright, *"The spotless Lamb (Jesus) allows the evil of the whole world to be concentrated on himself. He doesn't keep it in circulation by reacting with violence, nor does he escape into the ineffective innocence of quietism. He takes the weight of the world's evil upon himself, so that the world may emerge, clear."*

Jesus came *"not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (10:45).

Mark highlights that Jesus comes as our Servant King. He isn't about status, position, power, or glory. He is all about caring for real people in real difficult situations. People like Bartimaeus, and you, and me.

Jesus' challenge to us is that life is not about status, position, power, or glory either. *"Among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else"* (10:43-44). *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me"* (Mark 8:34).

"Taking up the cross is not a passive operation," says Wright. *"It comes about as the Church attempts, in the Power of the Spirit, to be for the world what Jesus was for the world – announcing the Kingdom, healing the wounds of the world, challenging the power structures that keep anger and pain in circulation. We need to pray that we will have the courage, as a Church and as Christian persons, to follow the Servant King, wherever he leads ..."*

"We have seen what happens when people dream wild dreams of world domination and use the normal methods of force and power to implement them. We have not yet seen what might happen if those who worship the Servant King, now enthroned as Lord of the world, were to take him seriously enough to take up our cross and follow him. But that, as Mark reminds us, is precisely what the servant King calls us to do."

What is Jesus saying to me?

*Son of God,
you love each one of us
as if there were just one of us.
Some of us have striven hard
to obey your commands.
Some of us have drifted here,
unsure of the path they tread.
All of us are actually here simply because of your mercy.
We are individuals, each of us, saved by grace.*

*Son of God,
you love each one of us
as if there were just one of us.
How can we not sing your praises
for all that you have done for us?
All of us are here simply because of your mercy.
We are individuals, each of us, saved only by grace.
Amen*

John Birch

Saturday, September 30: Philippians 2:1-18 (Knowing God, our Saviour, Jesus)

Has following Jesus made a difference in your life? Has His love changed you? Has being part of a church helped you and given you an opportunity to know God and to live your faith? I hope so.

If it has, says Paul, keep living out your faith. Live like a follower of Jesus. Sometimes we think this is complicated. But Paul's advice is amazingly practical. It's not rocket science. We can all do it ...

- Love one another.
- Agree wholeheartedly with each other and work together with one mind and purpose.
- Don't be selfish.
- Don't try to impress others.
- Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.
- Don't look out only for your own interests but take an interest in others.
- Do everything without complaining and arguing.
- Live clean, innocent lives as children of God.
- Shine like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.
- Hold firmly to the Word of life.

Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example of how we should live. He exemplified these values wonderfully. Who then is Jesus? He is the perfect model of what it means to be truly human.

Read Philippians 2:1-18 over a couple of times. What are you learning about Jesus? What are you learning about yourself? What one change can you make to live out these verses more consistently, today?

*Lord, make me see your glory in every place.
If mortal beauty sets my heart to glow,
help me see your grace shining even brighter.
If natural wonders stop me in awe,
may your Majesty cause me to worship you even more.
You have given me on earth this spiritual soul,
a prisoner behind these weak walls of flesh.
How can that soul break free?
How can my spirit find its true life?
Dear Lord, I cry to you for help.
Your Spirit alone can save me.
May your Spirit flow through my will and my senses,
redeeming what is sinful,
empowering and inspiring what is good.
All goodness, Lord, must fail without your Spirit:
for you alone have the power and glory.
Amen.*

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

Sunday, October 1: Psalm 33 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

As we continue to think about the Trinity – the mystery that God is three-in-one and one-in-three – we have thought about God, the Father and Jesus, the Son. Today we move on to the Holy Spirit, God within us. When we speak of the Holy Spirit, we often focus on the New Testament writings. But if God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit, we should find inklings of the Spirit throughout Scripture. There certainly are prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. What about the Spirit? Is He in the Old Testament?

The Hebrew (Old Testament) word used for the Spirit is *ruach*. This word has a variety of meanings (just as the word "spirit" does in English). *Ruach* is the Hebrew word for wind, breath, mind, spirit (in general), and Holy Spirit (in particular). At a mundane level, *ruach* can refer to wind. For instance, the four "winds" or

points of the compass ([Jeremiah 49:36](#)) or the “breath” of living creatures ([Genesis 7:15](#)), including people ([Genesis 2:7](#), [Isaiah 42:5-6](#)). At a higher level, *ruach* refers to the human mind, spirit, or wisdom ([Deuteronomy 34:9](#), [Ezekiel 11:5](#)).

In a still more profound way, *ruach* refers to God and His activity in the world. In Genesis 1:2, “*the Spirit (ruach) of God was hovering over the waters ...*” This imagery (“hovering”) reflects one of the common metaphors or pictures used to describe the Spirit – a bird (in particular, a dove, as in [Matthew 3:13-17](#)). What does the image/picture/metaphor of the Holy Spirit as a dove suggest?

In Psalm 33:6, “*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the **ruach** of his mouth.*” This psalm is a beautiful celebration of God as Creator, and His Spirit as key in creation (as in Genesis 1:2). In Psalm 33, all three of the Trinity are active in creation:

- God’s Word, a phrase used to describe Jesus (John 1:1)
- the LORD Himself speaks in creation: Psalm 33:7-9
- and the Spirit are all in wonderful synchronicity.

God – Father (the LORD), Son (the Word of the LORD) and Spirit (*ruach*) – are all involved in creating and sustaining the universe and the life within it. Isn’t it wonderful to know that God not only created everything (and created it good) but continues to support and sustain His creation, too? As you read Psalm 33, notice how active God still is in His creation and in our lives.

(Deeper Bible study aside: if you are interested, other Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit/*ruach* include [Genesis 41:38](#), [Exodus 31:3-5](#), [Numbers 24:1-2](#), [Deuteronomy 34:9](#), [Judges 14:19](#), [1 Samuel 10:6-10](#), [Nehemiah 9:20](#), [Psalm 51:11](#), [Ezekiel 2:1-2](#), [Zechariah 4:6](#). There are MANY others as well)

How does Psalm 33 speak to me today? How is God at work in my life today? What promise/encouragement/confidence does this give me for the future?

*My God, I don't ask You to take me out of this life,
but to prove Your power, the power of your Spirit, within it.
I don't ask for tasks more suited to my strength,
but for strength, the strength of your Spirit,
to make me more suited to my tasks.
I pray for a vision from your Spirit that moves me,
strength from your Spirit that endures,
and the grace of Jesus Christ,
who walked our earthly life as a conqueror in triumph.
Amen.*

William Edwin Orchard (1877-1955)

Monday, October 2: Zechariah 7 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

Most biblical prophets do NOT **foretell** the future. There is actually very little *foretelling* prophecy in the Bible. Most prophecy is **forth-telling** God’s truth into peoples’ present circumstances. Through His Spirit, God spoke His truth into people’s lives and communities, helping them see the good, bad, and sinful.

In Zechariah, for instance, God speaks about people in Zechariah’s world: “*They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his **ruach** through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry*” (7:12).

God continues to speak and apply His truth about issues in our lives and society, too:

- God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible.
- God speaks to us through godly believers (who speak “prophetically” into our lives sometimes,

- helping us see truth/error, wisdom, affirmation/correction, and direction for today).
- God speaks directly to our consciences, souls, and minds.

To the Israelites (and us), God says, "*Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.*" Those were crucial issues to Israel at that time. They reflect God's greater commands to "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength*" and to "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*"

The Spirit may be saying things directly to me that are specific to my life and circumstances. He may be saying things to our church about how we can serve Him and obey Him right now.

- As I reflect on the great commands ("*Love God ...*" and "*Love your neighbour ...*") what are You saying to me, Lord? What are You speaking into my life?
- What are you saying to our church? How can I make that come into being?

*Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures
of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your Spirit is filling us,
your hand leading us,
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Lutheran Book of Worship

Tuesday, October 3: Luke 10:1-22 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

"Jesus was filled with the joy of the **Holy Spirit**, and he said, 'O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike.'" What qualities of character does the Spirit reveal through Jesus' life?

Those who allow the Spirit to control more and more of their lives – who are "filled" with the Spirit – find a deep joy. Joy is different from happiness. Happiness is a mood of the moment. Joy is a deep-seated quality of character that comes from knowing all my life and all my experience is safe in Jesus' hands (our "*names are registered in heaven*" [Luke 10:20]).

Joy, like God's peace and hope, sees me through happy and unhappy times. In tough times, Paul writes, "*I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with **joy** and **peace** because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident **hope** through the power of the **Holy Spirit***" (Romans 15:13).

Centuries ago, Russian monks spoke of "joyful sorrow." In hard situations, people know God's presence and joy. For instance, Jesus knew He had to suffer and die. Yet He lived joyfully in relationship with His Father and His disciples. "*A servant is not greater than his master ...*" says Jesus (John 15:20). We can expect hard times, but we can make it through with deep joy because of our relationship with our Father, our Saviour, the Spirit, and one another. Even in our sorrow, through our faith in Jesus, we can find joy.

The Spirit gives us wisdom and insight. I can be wise and clever in our own eyes and make a mess of my life (my knowledge is incomplete; my wisdom is often biased and flawed; my cleverness is often not clever). The Spirit can give me the ability humbly to trust **God's** wisdom, truth, and guidance.

The Spirit gives us power to serve God in His Kingdom. The disciples do not go out in their own strength. The Spirit empowers them. I don't live my life in my own strength – in my home, neighbourhood, school,

or workplace. The Spirit gives me the courage, insight, and power to be His witness and servant.

Lord, may I know your joy. May I have the childlike faith to trust Your wisdom and Word. May your Spirit empower and equip me to serve You today and every day.

*Almighty God, you are the giver of all good things.
Without your help all labour amounts to nothing.
Without your grace all wisdom is folly.
I pray that as I step into today,
your Holy Spirit may fill me.
May I promote Your glory.
May I speak of your salvation.
Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Lord bless me.
Amen.*

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Wednesday, October 4: John 3:1-21 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

John 3 is a very familiar passage. It is a powerful, clear, concise exposition of Jesus' mission and good news for the entire universe ("the world" in 3:16 is the Greek word **κοσμος** – kosmos – which means **all** of creation, not just people). We usually read these verses, focussing on Jesus' message of redemption, "*God so loved the world ... so we may have eternal life*"(3:16).

Today, reread these verses, focussing on Jesus' teachings on the Holy Spirit, particularly in 3:5-8. We usually skip these verses. Like Nicodemus, we find them difficult ("*How can this be?*"[3:9]).

In Greek, as in Hebrew, the word for "Spirit" (Greek "*pneuma*") is also the word for "wind." Translators decide by context which word to use in English, "Spirit" or "wind."

Reread John 3:5-8 (note especially v.8): "*I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the **pneuma** (Spirit/wind). Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the **pneuma** (Spirit/wind) gives birth to **pneuma** (Spirit/wind). You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The ***pneuma** (Spirit/wind)* blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the **pneuma** (Spirit/wind).*"

In many translations, all but the beginning of v.8 (marked with * above) are translated "Spirit." Why change that one translation? I wonder if Jesus did not mean them all to refer to the Spirit? It's a wonderful picture of the Spirit: "*The Spirit blows/moves wherever He pleases. You hear His voice, but you cannot tell where He comes from or where He is going.*" He surprises us.

We are spiritual beings in earthly "temples." "*We are not bodies who have souls,*" writes C.S. Lewis, "*we are Souls who have bodies.*" Both our bodies and our spirits/souls are both precious to God.

When we understand we are not just physical beings made of common chemical elements (our bodies are mostly composed [born?] of water), we can appreciate our true identity as God's beloved children. We are souls/bodies born of the Spirit. "*To all who received Him, to those who believed in Him name, he gave the right to become **children of God ... born of God***"(John 1:12-13).

Lord, I receive You. I believe in Your name. Thank You that I am Your child. Thank You that I am also born of the Spirit. Your Spirit is in me. May I live by Your truth and Your light (3:20-21).

Thank You, Lord, that Your Holy Spirit moves wherever He pleases. Help me see what You are up to, so I can be part of building Your kingdom in my community, church, and home.

*I do not know, my God, what may happen to me today.
 I only know nothing will happen to me that you haven't foreseen from all eternity.
 That is sufficient, my God, to keep me in peace.
 May your Spirit give my spirit peace.
 May your Spirit give my spirit strength.
 May your Spirit give my spirit hope.
 I adore your eternal designs.
 I submit to them with all my heart.
 I desire them all and accept them all.
 I make a sacrifice of everything.
 I unite this sacrifice to that of your dear Son, my Saviour.
 I pray for patience in troubles.
 And I pray for perfect submission to your will and your way.
 Amen.*

Madame Elizabeth of France, written in prison while awaiting the guillotine (1764-1794)

Thursday, October 5: John 14 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

Jesus' greatest teachings on the Holy Spirit come during His final meal with His disciples, just before His arrest and crucifixion. They are recorded in John 14-16. After supper, Jesus says, *"I will be with you only a little longer ... Where I am going, you cannot come"* (John 13:33). As Jesus tells His disciples about His impending arrest and death, He says, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled ..."* (14:1). Of course, they have no clue what He is talking about. Had they understood at all, they certainly would have been very troubled.

In our lives we've no idea what the future will bring, either. We never know when a great blessing or a great tragedy may come into our lives. We never know whether today will bring good news or bad news. To us, unsure of what the rest of today (let alone tomorrow) may bring, Jesus says:

- *"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me."*
- *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me ... you do know the Father and have seen him in me."*
- *"If you love me, obey my commandments."*
- *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Advocate**, who will never leave you. He is the **Holy Spirit**, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and will be in you."*
- *"Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me."*
- *"Because you love me, my Father will love you."*
- *"I will love you and reveal myself to each of you."*
- *"All who love me will do what I say."*
- *"My Father loves you, and we will come and make our home with each of you."*
- *"When the Father sends the **Advocate** as my representative – that is, the **Holy Spirit** – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you."*
- *"I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."*

What is Jesus saying to me? What is the Holy Spirit doing in my life?

The Holy Spirit does not typically whisper strange new tidings in our ears. Most often, He reminds us of the Father and of Jesus. He reminds of God's love. God's comfort. God's presence. God's power. God's care. God's wisdom. God's words.

May the Spirit deepen our understanding of God's/Jesus' love and truth and apply them to the constantly changing situations which we face.

*How is it, my God, that you have given me this hectic busy life?
 I have so little time to enjoy your presence.
 Throughout the day people are waiting to speak with me,
 and even at meals I have to continue talking to people about their needs and problems.
 During sleep itself, I am still thinking and dreaming about the multitude of concerns that surround me.
 To me, my present pattern of life is a torment.
 Yet I do all this not for my sake but for yours, don't I?
 I say, "It is a sacrifice of love," but maybe I do it more for myself than for you?
 I know that you are constantly beside me, yet I'm usually so busy that I ignore you.
 Is that worship?
 Stop me from being so busy.
 By your Spirit, force me to think about and love you, even during my hectic activity.
 By your Spirit, release me from my busyness.
 By your Spirit, show me how others can take over my responsibilities.
 God of love, help me to remember that Christ has no body now on earth but ours,
 no hand but ours, no feet but ours.
 Ours are the eyes that see the needs of the world.
 Ours are the hands with which he blesses everyone.
 Ours are the feet with which he goes about doing good.
 But he does not call me to forfeit my soul to serve him.
 By your Spirit, help me never to forget you
 in my busy-ness to serve you.
 Amen.*

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Friday, October 6: John 15 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

We live in the fulfillment of this promise: *"When the Advocate/Counselor/Comforter (Holy Spirit) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me."* The Holy Spirit has come in this way ([Acts 2](#)).

When tough times come, we have His presence with us. He is always with us.

Jesus reminds us, *"No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* Following Jesus is not a guaranteed path to popularity, fame, fortune, health, or prosperity. The opposite may often be true. Following Jesus can make life more difficult.

The opening illustration of John 15 reminds us that, *"The vine-grower has a sharp knife, and a keen eye to the vine's health. If he cuts out, it is to make the plant more vigorous and fruitful. Lord, when I feel your sharp touch, I may resent it; but I trust your love for me"* (Frank Doyle). We need to trust God's work in our lives, painful though it may be. It's only as we abide/remain in Him that we can face the challenges life throws at us.

This imagery also reminds us that any fruit in our lives are the work of God. We can see the life and work of God in others and in ourselves – in ministry, love, commitment, courage, endurance, and ordinary daily kindness and compassion. Each of us is gifted in some unique way. Each of us can bear fruit for God's kingdom in a way nobody else can. The nature of this fruit – the way we live and spread the good news of the kingdom – will be different in our lives than in someone else's. But God IS at work in each of our lives.

Prayer can help us recognize the fruit God is cultivating in our lives, develop them, and offer them in the service of God and God's people.

How is God speaking to me today? How is His Spirit leading me today? What will I do about it?

*O Holy Spirit of greatest power,
come down upon us and rule over us.
May Your light show us the way and guide our paths.*

*Father, beloved by all your creation,
from whom all gifts and goodness come.
shine your mercy into our hearts and shield us from all harm.*

*Saviour Jesus,
without your grace there is nothing in us that is worthy of merit,
but through your mercy we know the Way, the Truth and the Life.
Your wisdom is what we need most.
Your Word is the counsel we would best obey.
Your presence alone makes life worth living.*

*When our hearts are hard, make them soft and open to Your Spirit.
When our ways are wandering, guide and welcome us home as our loving Father.
When we stumble and fall, forgive our sins through Your Son, our Saviour.
When we hurt, hold us close, O loving God,
one-in-three and three-in-one.
We put our trust in you, Father, Son, and Spirit.
Amen.*

Saturday, October 7: Acts 2:1-21 (Knowing God, the Holy Spirit within us)

Sometimes the Spirit is referred to as a dove. What does this suggest? Or as the wind. What does this suggest? Or as fire (see [Matthew 3:11](#), [Acts 2:1-4](#)). What does this image of the Holy Spirit suggest?

The context in Acts 2 is this: the disciples are not yet blessed with the Spirit in their lives.

- They know all **about** God and Jesus, but they do not yet know Him **in a personal way** – inside their souls and hearts – the way we do. They are waiting for that promised gift ([Acts 1:1-5](#)).
- They are struggling to believe Jesus' resurrection and His promise of the Spirit.
- They are also afraid for their lives. They are in a city (Jerusalem) that is anti-Jesus (here He had been crucified 7 weeks earlier). It is populated with people from many linguistic/cultural groups.

What do you think would be the perfect way for the Holy Spirit to show the truth about God, Jesus, and Himself – to the believers AND to Jerusalem – in that time and place?

- The Spirit comes with undeniable signs and power (fire!). This is just what the scared, skeptical disciples and their unbelieving neighbours need.
- The Spirit comes, blessing the disciples with the ability to talk about Jesus in a multitude of languages (note, these are REAL languages, not unknown tongues). This is just what the multi-ethnic Jews and others in the city, who spoke many different languages, need.
- The Spirit brings unity in diversity. This is just what the scattered disciples and new believers need.

Peter's message – inspired by the same Spirit – is the perfect message to first century Jews. It is steeped in the Jewish scriptures. He quotes their own prophets to share the good news about Jesus with them.

What is the perfect way for the Holy Spirit to show the truth about God, Jesus, and Himself to our community, in **our** time and place? What are the great needs in our culture? They are different from 1st century Jerusalem; they are different from 17th century Britain, or 2023 New York (Tim Keller's church). We can expect the Spirit will work uniquely in our community and church. That is exciting. But also challenging. We have to prayerfully work through who God is calling us to be ...

In 2023 Lethbridge, our issues include:

- **Truth.** How can the Spirit speak truth into our lives? Through us to others?
- **Community.** How can the Spirit build our church to be a genuine community of love in a polarized city ([Acts 2:42-47](#) is a wonderful picture of what a Christian community – a church – can be)? How can we bless our city by being and creating authentic community, rising above polarization?
- **Comfort, care, and justice.** Who are those struggling most in our city? God has a special place for them (in ancient Israel, they were the orphans, widows, poor, ill, and foreigners. Who are the needy people in our city?). How can we provide comfort, care, and justice for all?
- **Authentic worship.** How can we genuinely worship God? How can we help others worship Him?
- **What else???** How can we see God's leading in the midst of this ...?

The Spirit will bless us with the gifts we need to be who He has called us to be and do what He has called us to do (1 Corinthians 1:7). Craig Van Gelder writes, "*The Spirit is able to transcend human limitations and failures in bringing about God's redemptive purposes.*" That's good news for us.

- How is the Spirit leading me today?
- How can I live "in the Spirit" today?

*Here we are in front of you, Holy Spirit.
We feel the weight of our differences,
but we are united together in your name.
Come to us, help us, enter into our hearts.
Teach us what we should do, what path we should follow.
Do for us what you ask us to do.
Be the only one to offer and guide our decisions,
because only you – with the Father and the Son –
have a glorious and holy name.
Do not allow us to miss out on doing what is right,
O Spirit who loves order and peace.
Don't let ignorance lead us away from you.
Don't let human sympathy bias us.
Don't let people or positions influence us.
Keep us intimately close to you, using the gift of your grace,
so that we may be as one with you
and so that nothing can separate us from your truth and love.
Amen.*

Isidore of Seville (560-636)

Thanksgiving Sunday, October 8: Psalm 119:105-112 (Knowing God through His Word)

How do we know about God? How do we know God's truth?

The Spirit's mission is to complete God's work in the world. He is the One who leads us to faith in Jesus. He brings us into community with other believers. He is within us. But we must be careful of blindly trusting our "inner voice." Our own emotions, desires, fears, and hopes can warp our sense of God's leading. What we may think is God's voice inside us, may be our own feelings, biases, and prejudices talking.

Scripture is one way in which the Spirit sustains spiritual life. He authors the Bible by inspiring its writers. And He speaks through the Bible, helping us apply His truth to our lives and world. Whatever we sense as the Spirit's leading, we need to check it against God's Word, Scripture. The Bible records for us the truth of God revealed by His Spirit, directing us to God in Christ, bringing us face-to-face with the loving, Saviour God. It's our reality check.

We are a "people of the book." As God's inspired truth, the Bible is foundational for our faith and the source of guidance for our lives. It is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. Scripture reveals God to us, is our moral compass, teaches us truth about God, reveals our sinfulness, and teaches us salvation through

Jesus. It is also a measuring stick to evaluate those inner promptings. Anything God's Spirit says to us will be consistent with what we read in Scripture.

When Paul was in Berea, the Bereans, "*searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth*" (Acts 17:11). If our feelings and beliefs are consistent with God's Word, great. If not, they are not from God.

We believe the Bible *is* God's inspired Word to us. This is why we encourage you to read Scripture every day. Reading other books, listening to music, searching (good) blogs, scouring (reputable) websites have merit, but ultimately God's truth is found in His Word. We need to read and know Scripture.

(Aside: Of course, the Bible describes some things – like historical events and "scientific" truth – in terms the original authors understood, rather than modern scientific categories. For example, biblical authors describe the sun rising and setting, even though we know the sun stays still and the Earth rotates on its axis. The Bible is not a modern scientific textbook. It's not in error or conflict with modern science. Scripture is teaching bigger truths about God, sin, salvation, and new life in Jesus. It. We don't need to force the Bible to be something it's not intended to be. There is wisdom in this quote attributed to Galileo Galilei: "*The Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.*")

Psalms 119 is a long, passionate poem by a person who loves God's Word (you are welcome to read more of it than verses 105-112). Knowing Scripture is God's Word for us, how can I *love* God's Word? How can I read it with more passion and purpose?

- Thank God for Scripture, today.
- How can I be thankful for all of God's good blessings, today?

*Your word,
that lamp for our feet,
reveals to us the stony ground we often tread upon,
where, stumbling in our weakness,
we reach out a hand for you to hold.
We ask simply that you lead us once again
to firmer ground.
Lead us to the Rock which is higher than us –
Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer.
Jesus is the One with whom our journeying began.
With Him, in safety, we can rest awhile.
With Him, in joy, we can journey on.
With Him, in love, we can change the world.
Amen*

John Birch