

God the Holy Spirit

Today is the third and final sermon in a series on the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Today we will focus on the Spirit, often referred to as the third aspect of the Trinity.

It is important to try to appreciate that these are not 3 separate entities. They are unique one from the other, but they are also connected somehow. One body, 3 dimensions. Today we will have a look at how God's Holy Spirit came to the disciples who were gathered together in a house in Jerusalem. We find it in the New Testament in the Book of Acts. But we also find it in the Old Testament in a number of places, and I am going to share one of those with you now.

From Psalm 139 –

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

The Trinity is not a simple concept to figure out. And there is no definitive proclamation on the subject so theologians do the best they can in attempting to explain it. One of the popular ways is 3 intersecting circles. Each has a separate, distinct area, but yet all three interlock and intersect at some point. Perhaps you will come up with a more helpful descriptor.

So today we are going to take a look at God the Spirit. We often focus on this at Pentecost. The passage from Acts 2 is dramatic to say the least and stimulates our senses.

Before we get to the actual event, we need to set the stage and define an important term. Pentecost.

Generally, we refer to Pentecost as the day when God bestowed His Spirit upon the disciples in such a dramatic way. But actually, Pentecost was a Jewish celebration long before this familiar scene. It was a great festival in the Jewish tradition also referred to as the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of the Harvest, the Day of the First Fruits, Shavuot, and Pentecost. For generations, it had absolutely nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. So it is helpful to expand our understanding of Pentecost and the festival that it originally was.

Pente is Greek for 5 or 50. The festival of Pentecost took place 50 days after Passover. Passover is a major Jewish spring festival which

commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, led by Moses. You can read more about it in the book of Exodus.

The final thing we need to clarify is the notion of Speaking in Tongues which comes up in this passage. It is also called Glossolalia, uttering of words or speech like sounds believed to be unknown by the speaker. It is described as a sort of religious ecstasy or trance. Speaking in tongues is speaking to God. It cannot be taught and if it is to be understood by others, it needs to be interpreted by someone who has the gift of interpretation.

So the stage is set!

Jesus had been crucified and had resurrected. The disciples are sitting in a room in a house in Jerusalem. They are there for Passover. But they are grieving the loss of their Lord. They are fearful. They have no idea what lies ahead. They heard an odd sound. It sounded like blowing wind. The sound fills the house. Then they begin to see something. It looks like tongues of fire. The tongues separate and

come to rest on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit
... the Spirit of God.

They all began to speak, but they could not understand each other.

They could not even understand themselves. The Jews in the area heard the sounds created by the rushing wind and they raced to the house where the disciples were staying. They recognized so many regional languages that these disciples of Christ were speaking – languages from around the countryside. And everyone declared the wonders of God.

But many of the Jews were skeptical as some people always are. “They have had too much wine to drink,” some said. Peter explained that this behaviour and spectacular event had nothing to do with wine. And then he began to quote from the prophet Joel – a Scripture with which the Jews were only too familiar. Peter speaks –

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the
Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

What would the Jews be thinking ... these backwoods Galileans,
speaking foreign languages???? The educated, sophisticated, arrogant
Jews were shocked. These lowly pilgrims had come to celebrate the
Feast of the Harvest and here they were, the center of all of this rushing
wind and tongues of fire, and speaking in strange languages which even
they did not understand!

I think this is one of the most colourful, dramatic scenes in the Bible.

But what in the world does it have to do with any of us in 2020?

Consider this – The Spirit of God responsible for the birth of Jesus who is referenced in Luke 1:53, is also responsible for the birth of the church in Acts 2.

Consider this – the gift of the Spirit of God in Acts 2, fulfills John the Baptist's prophecy in Matthew 3. "I baptize you with water, but the one who comes after me will baptize with the Holy Spirit."

Toward the end of Luke, Jesus tells his disciples to go and wait in Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high. In the first chapter of Acts, Luke writes these words –

"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one

occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit of God. As it was with Jesus, it was with God in the beginning and is with God at the end.

The word Advocate is used concerning the Holy Spirit. Advocate, Paraclete, Helper ... synonyms for the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of John, Jesus says his to his disciples –

"If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me,

and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

So this is what the Bible has to say. What do you have to say on the topic of the Holy Spirit?

Do you have a sense, even if perhaps you can't explain it well, that God has not abandoned you ... that God advocates for you through the mystery of the Holy Spirit? Your helper and guide ...

Do you, from time to time, get a sense that you are not alone ... that even if you can't physically see it or touch it, something wonderful is near you or watching you, or enfolding you in love and courage and peace?

Do you ever just feel drawn to something or someone ... feeling that you need to do or say something which you might not know where it has come from, but you just have this sense of what to do or where to go or who to speak to?

The Spirit of God is perhaps more difficult to describe or define than the Son of God, or God the Father. But Mystery is like, that isn't it?

Again it gets back to the notion of faith ... that which we believe, but cannot see, or touch, or prove ... it's not easy to see a mustard seed sometimes, but you know it is there.

God bless you as you continue your journey.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.