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Series: Doctor's Notes
Message: God with Us, God In Us (Motif of Holy Spirit)
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Well, we've come to the final message in our four part series on Doctor Luke's storytelling. We've been tracing how Luke tells his story through themes or motifs. We started out with tackling the big and challenging topic of prophecy; a challenge because it's not a concept or even word that we use in the 21st century. We also had our 21st century assumptions challenged when we walked through Luke's writing as he boldly elevated women. Then, last week, we followed the life of Jesus and the early church by looking at how Luke tells their story with particular places. Each week, I think, we've been given this gift of distancing ourselves from the text. What I mean by that is that each week we've been given a gift of looking at the story through first century eyes.

And this week we come to our last motif, the motif of the Holy Spirit. But, before we get there, I want to start with a question.

Have you ever had a first impression of something or someone that turned out to be wrong?

Maybe a first impression of a person you met turned out to be wrong. You thought they were odd or not like you or that their personality was not to your liking . . . but as time went on, you found out that your first impression wasn't true. This might not be true for you, but for me, I trust my first impressions pretty strongly, although I'm painfully aware that I'm not always 100% right on them. And, when I'm wrong, it often takes me a long time to realize it.

First impressions can be hard to reverse. I think this is especially true when it comes to the Holy Spirit. For someone who came to bring comfort and unity, the subject of the Holy Spirit is very often the source of disunity and even fear. For some of us, we don't even want to really look too deeply into the Holy Spirit because of a bad first impression we've had, mostly from people who have a strong opinion or claimed experience of the Spirit.

Now, undeniably, the Spirit is a big motif for Luke, with 92 separate mentions of the word spirit . . . most of them being specific references to the Holy Spirit. From my research, the Holy Spirit is the biggest motif for Luke and so it would be only fitting to make the biggest motif the topic of one of these four sermons.

As I set about the task of studying these motifs, I read through Luke and Acts about three times, making a great big excel table with all of my findings. I've been sifting through what the plain reading of Luke on the Holy Spirit looks like and I've gotta admit to you that I was surprised by what I found. My first impression changed.

Now, I believe it is the task of the preacher to study the word and then tell stories around the study of the word in such a way that at least two things happen for the listeners. One, that they are inspired to become students of the word themselves, being free to read God's word on their own and to grow in love with God's word. And two, that they would be compelled to live God's word for themselves, not just being hearers of the word, but doers of the word. I hope that is what will happen today as we glean some gems from that honest reading of Luke on the Holy Spirit.

Well, I'm holding out on telling you my Big Idea for today's sermon kind of intentionally, and I'm going to make you wait a little bit longer. Let's start by looking together at how the Holy Spirit shows up in the beginning of Luke's story, which will lead me to today's Big Idea.

So, those 92 occurrences of the spirit in Luke's story start off strong in the story of Jesus' birth. Now, I will send the text for this sermon to Jennifer who, I believe, upload it to your website if you want to read the references for yourself as I list a lot of these occurrences of the Spirit.

First of all, it is prophesied that John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, will be filled with the Spirit so that he can be the announcer of the coming kingdom of God in Jesus, Luke 1:15, 17.

The HS is promised “to come upon” Mary, Luke 1:35. Elizabeth is described as “being filled with the Holy Spirit”, Luke 1:41, and the result is the baby leaping in her womb when Mary, also pregnant, comes to visit her cousin.

Zechariah is “filled with the Spirit”, and the result is that he prophesies about who Jesus will be Luke 1:67. The HS is on Simeon, Luke 2:25, and the result is the HS reveals future things to him (that he would not see death until Jesus came). The HS then leads Simeon to the temple, and he prophesies over Jesus.

Keeping in step with some of our earlier themes, a plain reading of the text reveals that the Holy Spirit speaks through old men and women. Don’t let the profoundness of that pass you by!

Next, John the baptist prophesies that Jesus’ baptism will be “with fire and with the HS,” Luke 3:16.

These are the opening stories of the coming of Jesus, with the Spirit speaking boldly through old men and young unimportant women after the word of the Lord had been silent for 400 years. Up until this time, too, the Spirit had not been overtly revealed to the people of Israel. They believed and lived into the God of their ancestors, Yahweh. They believed in one God, and in the coming of his son. There are a lot of references to the Spirit in the Old Testament, but we do not gain a clear idea or understanding of the Trinity, one God in three persons, until the baptism of Jesus by his cousin John.

Here, there is a pivotal shift in our understanding of God as God the Son is baptized, God the Spirit descends on him as a dove, and God the Father proclaims, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” Luke 3:22. There’s been a shift in the story for no longer is the Spirit speaking from a distance about things to come, but he has come upon Jesus in the flesh.

Alright, we’re inching closer to my big idea, but there’s one more turn in the early story of Luke about the Spirit. What is the first thing that happens to Jesus after he is filled with the Spirit? The Scriptures say he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The Spirit comes upon Jesus and the enemy of God knows it. Jesus is undeniably marked as God’s beloved Son, and yet as

God's Son he does not give into Satan's temptation but defeats Satan in the desert . . . setting a precedent for how Jesus will interact with Satan for the rest of the story: as victor. Luke says that after Jesus returns from the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan for forty days, that he returns in the power of the Spirit, Luke 4:14. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and he returns triumphant, in the power of the Spirit.

So far in Luke's eyewitness account, it has been prophesied by the Spirit that Christ would come. Christ is born, he is given God's approval as beloved son at his baptism, he reveals his power as God's son upon whom the Spirit rests when he withstands Satan, and now Jesus is ready to begin his ministry in the power of the Spirit.

So, **why** was the Spirit of the Lord upon Jesus? Jesus will make this unequivocally clear in what happens next.

Jesus enters the temple, opens the scriptures, and reads these words from Isaiah the prophet (Is. 61:1):

Luke 4:18

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Jesus is very clear about why he has been given the Holy Spirit, and it is for the purpose of social justice: proclaiming good news **to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed.**

So here's my Big Idea for today's sermon: The Holy Spirit is passionate about freedom.

We often want the Holy Spirit for some notion of sensationalism: I want to feel alive, I want to prophecy and so I want to be full of the Spirit. These are the wrong reasons to be filled with the Spirit. For Jesus, the filling of the Spirit resulted in the betterment and freedom of others.

Paul will agree with Jesus' statement of freedom when he says in 2 Cor. 3:17 "Now the Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

For the rest of the Gospel, we see a triumphant and glorious Jesus going about the work of freeing people. He performs miracles, silences demons, kicks greedy money lenders out of God's house, raises the lowly, elevates women, preaches the Gospel to the sick, loves little children, chastises the religious elite, and sets an undeniable precedent of the kingdom of God being about social justice.

The Spirit is upon Jesus for the purpose of liberty. Nowhere in Luke does the Spirit come for mere personal edification or to puff oneself up with notions of, "I've got a special gift that you lack." No. The Spirit is upon Jesus for the express purpose of lifting the lowly out of poverty, liberating those in bondage, and changing the culture of oppression that was so pervasive in the Greco Roman world. The Holy Spirit is upon Jesus for the purpose of liberty.

And, you won't be surprised by my next statement, that this same Spirit acts the same way in the second half of Luke's story. There's continuity for Luke, as Jesus liberated, so the early church liberates . . . and so we are to liberate. But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

So, we've seen this pivotal moment in time in Luke where Jesus quotes an old testament prophecy about himself, then stands up and says it is fulfilled. Does the same thing happen in Acts? You bet it does! Let's look at the second half of the story now.

Acts

The chronology of the Spirit in Acts is thick! You can't turn a page of the book without some reference to the Spirit, and you see this right away with the words of Jesus as our risen Lord promises the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, just as he did upon Jesus.

And remember how John the Baptist prophesies that the baptism of Jesus will be that of fire and of the Spirit? Well, we see that in action in the first two chapters of Acts.

The Spirit comes, and the immediate result is that the disciples become witnesses, they become proclaimers, of Jesus' liberty to the nations, just as Jesus became the liberator to the poor. We're told by Luke that when the Spirit comes, a miracle happens and the people of God are able to witness the life of Jesus to other people who do not speak the same language as them. We see an immediate "passing of the baton" from Jesus to the disciples in that the Spirit of the Lord also rests on them so that the Gospel may be preached and lived to and among the poor.

Like me, maybe your first impression of someone imitating this same miraculous gift today is them flouting that gift in front of you, as if they have an inside "VIP" access card that makes them a holier Christian than you. If that was your first impression, it can be easy to miss the point of the early church's experience of the Spirit. The Spirit came in this miraculous way of giving the early church the gift of language for the purpose of liberty.

So, here's a litmus test for you if someone says they have a gift of the Spirit: are they using that gift to give liberty to the poor, or are they using it to elevate their own worth?

As this story of the Spirit's coming continues, Peter will give the very first sermon the early church has ever heard. In a mirroring fashion, Peter, like Jesus, will stand up in the midst of them and proclaim that a prophetic Hebrew scripture has been fulfilled in that very moment. Let's take a look at what Peter says.

16 Now, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17

"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.*

With these words age, social class, and gender are declassified and dethroned when the Spirit comes. With age, Joel prophecies that the Spirit will be poured out on the old and the young. With social class, Joel prophecies that servants--again both men and women--will receive the pouring out of the Spirit. With gender, Joel prophecies that the Spirit will be poured out on "your sons and your daughters." And Peter stands up in the crowd and testifies that this Scripture is fulfilled in their hearing.

These three things: age, gender, and social class, are the three biggest barriers in the world, and the cause of the greatest injustices. We see it with elder abuse, gender discrimination, and poverty because of class division. But Peter, by the power of the Spirit, says that these things are broken down, dismantled, overturned, and redeemed with the coming of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is passionate about freedom.

So, the Spirit rests upon Jesus and he proclaims liberty to the oppressed. The Spirit rests upon the early church, and the church proclaims liberty to the oppressed. The Holy Spirit is passionate about freedom.

And, just as Jesus' statement sets a precedent for how the rest of Luke unfolds with Jesus delivering the poor and oppressed, so too Peter's statement sets a precedent for how the rest of Acts unfolds with the church delivering the poor and oppressed.

For the rest of Acts, we see a triumphant and glorious church as she echoes Jesus in her acts of social justice, preaching the Gospel to the poor,

and proclaiming freedom to those in bondage. Just like Jesus, the Spirit is upon the early church for the purpose of liberty.

There are so many stories in Acts, but let's just remember together a few now. Paul, the persecutor of the church, is converted, and with his repentance, the Spirit comes upon him (9:17). Multiplication and strengthening happen in the early church because of the Spirit's presence (9:22).

Peter is given a vision by the Spirit where Peter is directly told to welcome all people, regardless of ethnicity. That's in Acts 11. The Spirit comes to the church in Ephesus in chapter 19. Just think about what it would be like to not have the book of Ephesians in our bible today had the church in Ephesus not been converted? There are stories of the Spirit coming to bring joy, to warn, to comfort, to be kept safe, and to speak the truth to the early church.

The plain reading of Acts declares to us that the Spirit is passionate about liberty. As Jesus received the Spirit, so does the early church, and so do we today.

Well, where does that leave us today? Let me say just a brief word on the Spirit and miracles because it's probably an elephant in the room. Friends, if we spend all of our energy arguing about whether the miracle of Pentecost is exactly replicated in the church today, I think we're missing the point, and quite frankly I think the enemy is happy about the division and confusion our arguing brings! The point of that miracle at Pentecost was that the Gospel spread freely to all people, breaking down barriers. Let's keep the main thing the main thing! And, if you're curious if somebody who claims to have a gift of the Spirit at work in them today, humbly test the fruit. Is that person full of: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? Is that person bringing liberty or pride to the church? Let that be the test.

Well, where else does this reading of Luke and Acts leave us? Let's think again about those two pivotal passages of scripture, quoted by Jesus and Peter. Jesus quotes Isaiah and Peter quotes Joel and both scriptures declare liberty to the three social barriers of poverty, gender, race, and age. How might they inform the church today as we join God in his mission?

Let's think about poverty. Today: According to World Vision, 97 million people fell into poverty since COVID-19 struck, adding no doubt to the 9.2% of the world who lives on less than \$1.90 a day.

Let's think about gender. The Taliban in Aghganastan is actively removing women from access to education as we speak. This week, BBC posted an updated news article on the shocking story that the Facebook owned tech-giant Instagram must still become exceptionally more proactive in banning and removing sex-trafficking content from its site.¹ In 2019, more than 300,000 potential violations of human rights were found from 1,000 users on Instagram; specifically of women being sold as slaves using Arabic hashtags. Last week's article bemoaned that new hashtags and continued sex trafficking is still happening on Instagram.

Let's think about race. Right at home, the ethnic barriers are calling out for removal as the blood of innocent, the memory of more than 6000 children killed by genocide in our own land cries out for justice.

Let's think about age. Sadly, in Canada the pandemic also revealed how much work needs to be done in our own beloved country with elder abuse as the conditions of long term care homes was sadly revealed in the pandemic. And right now, with the skyrocketing increase of the cost of living, many elderly openly submit that they have to walk right past the fresh fruit and veggies when they go to the grocery store and buy frozen goods because, in Canada, hard working retired elders can't afford fresh fruit and vegetables. And, after shopping for groceries, they have reduced quality of life with having no money for anything other than keeping a roof over their heads.²

The church who is alive and glorious in the Spirit is needed now more than ever, friends. So go ahead. Join Jesus on his mission "*to proclaim good news to the poor. To proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

Too long have we sat on the sidelines, arguing about how many angels fit on a head of a needle, while the world cries out for justice . . . and the justice that the Spirit still longs to bring to the world today through the living, glorious, enlivened, and passionate church. So come, regardless of age, race, gener, or

¹ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KI8gz3pCAEHWi7tdMRvhEeOLpK3t-httyKDuHHE-4fM/edit>

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/seniors-food-insecurity-poverty-1.5902422>

status . . . come into the kingdom of God. For the kingdom of God is justice, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. May it be so among us. Amen.

Benediction

Children of God,

Called into life in the Spirit,

Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall, remembering that it is God who is at work in you by the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill his desire for the kingdom of God coming to actively live and move among us today.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13 NIV)