

SERMON TITLE- "God The Holy Spirit"

TEXT- John 3:1-8

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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DATE- Oct. 17, 2010

This is the 3rd week in which we have looked at the question-
"Who Is God?"

We began with God the Creator.

Then we looked at Jesus, as God.

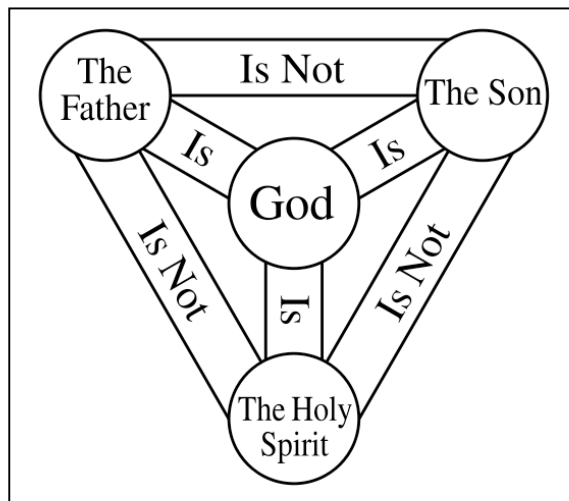
And now we look at the Holy Spirit, as God.

Since the Church began people have tried to come up with ways to understand this. That is the human way and I think we can assume that it is this way because we are created in the image of God as creatures that crave understanding.

But like everything else human, there are problems attached to this. The biggest problem is that God is beyond comprehension and we simply run into problems as we wrestle through it.

In the history of the church, it was in the 4th century that the church began to really work hard at how to explain the business of who or what God the Holy Spirit is and during those years came up with the concept of the Trinity. The language of the Trinity has been the dominant way of talking about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit since those years. It is set up in our own CoF

An historic depiction of the Trinity is this-



It is useful but doesn't solve the problem.

Today we are going to approach the 3rd part of this study in God. We are going to look at who or what the Holy Spirit is.

For this one we will really follow the narrative form of the ICOMB CoF.

We confess:

At Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit, who had acted in creation, in empowering the prophets, and in inspiring the Scriptures. Through the Spirit, God established the church, the body of Christ, to proclaim God's reign and to give witness to the new creation. The Spirit is poured out on all who receive Christ, baptizing them and sealing them for redemption as God's children. All who believe and confess Jesus as Lord are born anew into Christ. Believers are baptized by water into the new covenant community in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. By grace they are saved through faith to live out God's peace and love in the face of opposing circumstances. ICOMB

Who Or What Is The Holy Spirit?

The ICOMB CoF begins with the description of the Holy Spirit given in Acts 2. It is a dramatic picture-

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:1-4

#1. The Holy Spirit Was Sent To The Church On Pentecost

For the church, this was the beginning and it was a dramatic beginning. The scene is that the disciples had gathered in the days after Jesus was taken up to heaven and were basically trying to figure out what to do next. They had gone to Jerusalem because that was the last instruction that Jesus had given them.

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.

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:4-5

In fact it was 40 days after this instruction that this amazing pivotal event took place. And from that day forward the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on that group marked the beginning of a the amazing story of a movement expanding from a single Teacher and spreading around the world.

This was the moment that Jesus had told His disciples to wait for,

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus was the beginning. It began what has often been called, The Age Of The Spirit or The Age Of The Church. These 2 are rolled together into one inseparable bundle.

To understand what this means we do however need to go back into the Scriptural story and we go back to the very beginning. The Holy Spirit may have begun a new thing but the Holy Spirit was not a new thing in fact to understand the Holy Spirit one must go to the very beginning.

Our CoF carries on-

#2. The Holy Spirit Acted In Creation And Empowered The Prophets

We first meet the Holy Spirit in the very beginning-
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:1-2

When Jesus had talked to His disciples about the Holy Spirit He was not introducing some new idea into their vocabulary. The language of the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God, as He is called here was an integral part of the story that they were very familiar with. They knew that at creation the Holy Spirit had been present.

They also knew that when things happened among God's people that it was when the God's Spirit would come down on people that they would be empowered in varieties of ways.

They also knew that-

#3. The Holy Spirit Inspired The Scriptures

Peter spells it out for the church this way-

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21

The Scriptures are the Holy Scriptures for God's people. The Bible is not just a book, though it is a book and needs to be read like a book- it is the Word of God because it is inspired by God as He moved the writers of the Scriptures.

There is another aspect of this however- not only are the Scriptures sacred because of their origin- bringing understanding to the Scriptures is also part of the Holy Spirit's work.

#4. The Holy Spirit Begins The New Creation

All this was part of the package that Jesus' disciples, as they had been taught by their Jewish teachers would have known.

But Jesus does start to stretch who this picture is to be understood and He does so in an encounter with one of the Jewish teachers.

The story goes like this-

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." John 3:1-2

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" John 3:3-4

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' . . . " John 3:5-7

Jesus statement is dramatic but He means what He says when He tells Nicodemus that this statement is not supposed to be a surprise.

Why was Nicodemus supposed to know this? Because this too was a well known part of the Jewish story. As the OT story winds

towards its end the prophets began to speak of a day to come. It would be the Day Of The Spirit. One of the most famous of these prophecies is in the Book of Joel-

**I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions. Joel 2**

This kind of promise was echoed in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and virtually all the prophets. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he is supposed to know this. But while Nicodemus did know this Jesus clearly brought something to the surface that was not part of Nicodemus' regular faith.

What Jesus made specific, was that the Age of the Spirit that the prophets had foretold- was at hand. The promise of the prophets was now standing before him.

And this necessarily stretched Nicodemus and introduced the radical idea of being "born again." What is that supposed to mean? Nicodemus asked Jesus. Being born again has been part of the Christian vocabulary since then but let's not just accept it before we think about how radical the idea is.

Those who pick up their crosses to follow Jesus are born again of the Spirit- we are new creations born of the Spirit. This new birth defines us in a way that supercedes the natural birth that all human beings share.

So what does all this mean for us? I think that we all are like Nicodemus. We are for the most part ready to accept what has been said about the Holy Spirit. There are not likely to be any people who study and accept the Scriptures who would have a quarrel with any of these points.

So where is the point at which we are challenged?

#1. We Need To Wait For The Holy Spirit

There is probably nothing more difficult for most of us to do than waiting- especially when we don't know what we are waiting for. Any yet, as Jesus gives His instruction to His followers, as they are in the time after He is taken from them- He gives them one command-

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:4-5

There are a lot of challenges I have faced but none as challenging as waiting- especially when uncertainty and anxiety rule the moment.

This kind of waiting is not the pleasant waiting of a holiday, when we have the privilege of sitting back and enjoying a moment.

No the challenge of waiting stretches us to our very limits when we are in transition-

-when we are waiting for work

-when we are waiting for medical test results

-when we are waiting for our children to grow up

There are 1000s of scenarios of waiting that put us where the disciples were 2000 years ago and Jesus tells them to go and wait for the Holy Spirit- and they really have very little idea what that is supposed to mean or how long the wait is supposed to be.

And yet waiting and learning to wait is the first precursor that Jesus puts to His disciples.

There is a well known phrase that is a great counterpoint to Jesus' command to wait- it is "I have to do something- even if it is wrong."

In reality that is how we too often go through life's challenges. The waiting is just too hard.

The waiting that Jesus instructs His followers to do, however is not passivity. It is a deliberate choice to wait for God.

And even the middle of that waiting God gives promises to His people- "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength". There is a peace that God promises to His people even in the testing fire of the wait. This is not a glib peace, however. It is the peace that is tested by the fire of the wait.

Why is waiting the first thing that Jesus asks His followers to do? I don't know but for me- when I wait I am reminded of the Holy Spirit's primacy.

#2. We Need To Recognize The Holy Spirit's Primacy

This of course is a Biblical fact that was established from Genesis 1 onward. God works on earth through His Holy Spirit.

That is good to know but as merely abstract knowledge it doesn't make a lot of difference.

The imagery of Genesis 1:2 is very inspiring and there are 1000s songs and poems and book and other artistic and literary works that have launched off of it.

We can look around the world and the image of the Spirit of God hovering over creation has a powerful appeal.

But when Jesus tells His followers to wait He moved this from a beautiful image to something very personal.

While the Spirit of God moved in creation there is a very specific movement that He has in the life of the Church and the followers of Jesus.

Just as the Holy Spirit initiates creation- so too the Holy Spirit launches the church. This time it is with tongues of flame that rest over each of the disciples.

Now as far as I know that is an event that never has never been repeated although many stories like that have been told. But what the Bible does say, going forward from there is that each follower of Jesus is given a spiritual gift.

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant . . . Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good . . . All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Paul tells us that knowing this is very important. It is important because many followers of Jesus don't seem to know this. When we become children of God, by picking up and following Jesus- we are given a spiritual gift by God. Paul calls it a "manifestation" of the Spirit.

This is a spiritual fact but it is a spiritual fact about which knowledge is important. Why is this? Because how we act will be different based on what we know. If, for example, Jesus tells us to wait- it matters if we do or don't wait. If we are not really sure about the command- why would we wait? Why do do- as we are prone to do- just do something- even if it is wrong?

#3. We Need To Submit To The Holy Spirit

What does this mean? For me it has a very specific meaning- I need to deliberately choose day by day and hour by hour that as a

Kingdom person, what I am to do is not merely based on what I can see about me. I need to be aware of and sensitive to this powerful and mysterious force called the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit that is in my comes from a place beyond my comprehension- but a place that is very real.

2 More Critically Important Facts-

1. Acknowledging The Holy Spirit Is Not About Being Irrational

There has been a tendency from the earliest days of the NT church to assume that because the Holy Spirit works beyond our comprehension that the inverse of this is true. In other words, the less comprehensible and more bizarre something is- the more likely it is to have its source in the Holy Spirit.

This need to be spell out to be completely unbiblical and for obvious reasons- extremely dangerous. As God's people we are to make sense and the things we do make sense.

It is true that, to quote Paul-

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14

But it is also equally true that in 99% of the cases foolishness is just foolishness and that wallowing in foolishness rather than being examined is not a Kingdom value.

2. The Holy Spirit Works Behind The Scenes

When Jesus explained talked to Nicodemus about the new birth and the Holy Spirit, He added something very interesting-

The 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 Spirit." John 3:5-8

What does that mean? It distinguishes something about the Holy Spirit and Jesus. The Holy Spirit is forever in the background. It is seen only by what it produces.

There is a good reason why the Holy Spirit is not the subject of a lot of attention- the Holy Spirit does not demand this. In fact Jesus makes this point very specifically.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own . . . He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. John 16:13-14

What does this mean to us? It means that our awareness of importance and work of the Holy Spirit- but those who make the Holy Spirit the focus of everything are actually missing the point.