

CREDO SESSION 4: WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Transforming our hopes, our values and our expectations

Readings: *John 14: 16-18, 26; 16:13*



SERMON NOTES

In our previous sessions we have explored how the Creeds present a “big picture” of our faith; and we have begun to recognise the significance of our belief in a Trinitarian God revealed as God the Father, creator of all things, and God the Son - Jesus Christ, God with us, taking on human form and redeeming humankind by dying on the cross and rising to new life. We now turn to belief in the Holy Spirit - equal to, yet distinct from, God the Father and God the Son. It sounds easy, doesn't it, to say the words week by week - but reaching an understanding of the work and power of the Holy Spirit is quite another thing. And whilst the Apostle's Creed merely states “I believe in the Holy Spirit”, the Nicene Creed, finalised in its present form at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, elaborates by identifying the Spirit as “the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son”. And it goes further, by asserting that the Holy Spirit shares in the honour and praise of the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.

The account of creation, back in Genesis 1, declares that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters - the Hebrew word *ruach* is found almost 400 times in the Old Testament often translated as “wind” or “breath of life” (eg when God “breathed” life into Adam, when God send “wind” over the earth to recede the floodwaters, or when, in Ezekiel, God blew over dry bones and made them come back to life). The Greek word, *pneuma*, conveys a similar meaning of breath, wind and spirit.

In John 14 v 16 Jesus promised that the Spirit would indwell believers and that indwelling would be permanent. That gift is for all who believe, not for a select few. It's a permanent gift, and no conditions are placed on it. If we have believed and put our faith in Jesus Christ and trusted Him for the present and the future, then the Bible teaches beyond any doubt whatsoever that the “deal” has been sealed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit acts as guarantor of our salvation. The inheritance is ours - fully ours!

Whether we reached the point of faith at a particular moment in time, through a conversion experience. Or whether we have journeyed and know we have reached that point of faith – the fact is, we were brought to faith in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us and guarantees that inheritance.

So for all who believe, the Holy Spirit is an integral part of life, for without the Holy Spirit we could not know Jesus Christ at all. John 3 v 3-8 refers to being born of the Spirit. In Romans 8 St Paul says if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to him. You can't get plainer than that!

But understanding who the Holy Spirit is, and how we can be filled with Holy Spirit *power* really is exceptionally important. Truth is, we have an underdeveloped realisation of the power that God could unleash in our lives. Power to overcome, power to live better lives, power to rejoice, power to enrich others, power to be set free - releasing those streams of living water within us. In John 14 Jesus uses a special word to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. The word is *Parakletos* - one who comes alongside to help us on our journey. One who teaches “all things”; who reminds us of everything Jesus himself taught. One who imparts a deeper understanding of everything Jesus said and did.

When the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, there was opened up the possibility not only of experiencing the comfort and peace of his indwelling but also the continual, day to day experience of being filled with the Spirit. It is the difference between having a perfume locked in a box or tightly stoppered in a bottle, and releasing that stopper and letting the fragrance pervade every part of our life.

The help that the *Parakletos* gives includes living daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, allowing God to come right into our life and control the levers, permeating our attitudes and behaviour so that we begin to show forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our life. The extent to which we allow that to happen is a matter of choice – being open to the power of the Holy Spirit. It's therefore a question of what we actually *do* with the inheritance that is ours - spiritual power and strength is *never* limited and *always* available if we invite the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and fill us with that indwelling power.

So what can we make of all this? Do we, like those in Acts 2, truly long for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and among our church? Are we willing to be receptive, like the early Apostles in Acts 8? Or are we suspicious, reluctant, even dismissive of anything like the supernatural power of God's Holy Spirit? Maybe we feel it is all irrelevant - we are, after all, pretty self-sufficient people!

When Paul, in Ephesians 5:18, refers to being filled with the Spirit, he uses a present continuous tense - be being filled, over and over again - referring to this as a continuous filling over and above an initial experience. And the truth is, the richness of our Christian life, and depth and satisfaction is largely up to us. For so many, living the Christian life is like being in a fine restaurant, ordering the finest food, then worrying throughout about how you are going to pay the bill. That isn't the victorious Christian life we could enjoy! To be filled with the Holy Spirit, I have to empty myself of any part of me that isn't under his control. Then the *Parakletos* brings freedom - "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty". And as the Spirit begins to fill us on a constant basis, we begin to yield fruit., This is the fruit of the Spirit, which we read about in Galatians 5 v 22-26.

Of course, there are moments when the Holy Spirit "comes upon us". At times when we are seeking guidance. Or at times when we don't know what to say, the Holy Spirit gives us the words to say. Remember, God cannot be contained, so we can expect to be surprised when the Holy Spirit is at work! This may come in the form of the gifts of the Spirit as described in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 . Those gifts are not for entertainment, or for self aggrandisement, and often provide further evidence of the transformation of a Spirit-filled life.

Finally, a Spirit-filled person is at peace with God. Such a person radiates the warmth and peace that only a relationship with God can give, for they know that peace which passes all understanding.

The promise is for me and you! My prayer is that each of us would enter into the joy of our inheritance, that we might *claim* it, and *enjoy* it!

An act of dedication COME HOLY SPIRIT, COME UPON US NOW (adapted from an old Catholic prayer)

Come Holy Spirit, come, kindle a fire in our hearts today.

Penetrate with your light the deepest part of our souls, empower us with great faith, clothe us with your love and enlighten us with your wisdom. Renew our minds our hearts and our lives; come, saturate us with your presence and sanctify us.

Make every beat of our hearts a song of praise, blessing, thanksgiving and glory to God.

Replace our cold hearts with living furnaces of burning love for God. Make every cell of our bodies a holy altar of worship and service to God. Let peace reign in our midst, the peace that Jesus has given us.

Make us aware of the living presence of God at all times and increase our faith, hope and love, give us the grace to do always the will of God. Teach us to open our hearts and our lives to the will of God and to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Fill us with your goodness, teach us to share and to be compassionate. Anoint us with your purity, that we may live holy lives for the glory of God.

Fill us with understanding, patience, faithfulness, trustfulness, mercy, self control, humility, kindness, charity, obedience, piety, surrender and joy.

Fill us with the Word of God. Make us truly new creatures in Christ, help us to shine his light where there is darkness; to bring his peace and joy where there is unhappiness.

Fill us with the Power of Faith. With the great Love of God. With holy Wisdom. With abundant Grace. With Purity. With everlasting Peace and with the Light of God.

Dwell in us forever, with the Father and with the Son.

Come Holy Spirit, come, upon us now! Amen.

SOME POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why do you think God sent his Holy Spirit? Do we need the Holy Spirit today, or can we forget about Him?
- On a scale of “Indifferent”, “Receptive” and “Longing”, whereabouts would you place yourself with regard to the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
- Discuss the difference between the *fruit* of the Spirit and the *gifts* of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 respectively); consider examples and ways in which you have seen these demonstrated - whether in your own life or the life of others. How do the “fruit” and the “gifts” help us to overcome divisions?
- You may wish to spend some time sharing with one another any experiences of the Holy Spirit...and, crucially, what lessons you have learned from those experiences and how you sense they have been significant in equipping you to live the Christian life.

- What do you think the effect would be if, individually and collectively, we allowed the Holy Spirit more scope to work in our lives and our church?
- It is possible, according to Ephesians 4:30, to “grieve the Holy Spirit”. What do you think causes the Holy Spirit to grieve?
- If part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to help spread the word about Jesus, always pointing to him but crossing cultures and boundaries, where do you think the Spirit might be guiding you?

AS PART OF YOUR PRAYERS AS A GROUP, YOU MAY LIKE TO AFFIRM THE FOLLOWING:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

All: We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

All: We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

All: We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All: This is our faith.

We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.