

John 14:15-26
Deep Breath: Holy Spirit Introduction
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5-31-15

I want to begin this morning by asking all of you a question. How many of you, with where things are in your life, need to take a deep breath? For how many of you was the month of May crazy busy? I've decided that that May is the third month in the Holy Trinity of months on the calendar (December for Advent; April for Lent; May for Mother's Day, Graduations, Finals, planting, spring cleanup). The list can go on.

Well, you made it, May 31st and what better way to close out an absolutely batty month than with a picnic and a relaxed time of worship. Is everybody happy to be here? How many of you really just need to take a couple of deep breaths? Me too!

Last Sunday, we had an absolutely fantastic time of worship with baptisms, we celebrated Pentecost, and were reminded that at Pentecost God flooded the lives of the Apostles with his Holy Spirit, giving you and me the power to be witnesses to the resurrected Christ in our lives.

But I would guess that for many of us, myself included, there are times that you say to yourself, "Ok, I can begin to see God the Father and Creator of all things. Jesus I get. But what now about the Spirit?" If that's you, don't worry, you're not alone. I bet there are some who have witnessed some puzzling demonstrations of the "Holy Spirit," and what that has done is send us into the tangible, relatable, even doctrinal view of faith, because we just don't know what to do with the Spirit.

In fact, this week I had someone ask me about when and why a person would raise their hands in worship. And for questions like these, I think it's important for us to dig deeply into what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit – the elusive, mysterious, even shy member of the Trinity. But fear not, because this unseen presence of God is actually much more tangible and real than we might realize.

So I want to invite you to take a deep breath with me now, and listen to the Word of the Lord from John chapter 14:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

The first thing we hear Jesus say to us about the Holy Spirit is a statement about his nature. In John's gospel, Jesus gives 5 promises about the Holy Spirit and this one is the first. Do you see how personal the language is? Jesus says he will come, he will abide with you, he will be your advocate, helper, comforter. Now allow me to go a little geeky on you and tell you about a few of the words in John's text, because they will help us as we begin. The Greek word Jesus uses for Advocate here is the word *Parakletos*, which is

a compound word (*para*: “alongside”; and *kletos*: “called”). The Holy Spirit is one who God calls to walk alongside us.

In most religions, the Spiritual is expressed as a distant and wholly other, but what Jesus tells us is that the Holy Spirit is near, intimate and relational. In fact, the Bible even says that the Spirit feels deep emotions (the Spirit grieves, Eph. 4:30; the Spirit feels outrage, Heb. 10:29). So Jesus, as he is preparing his disciples—who, by the way, still really aren’t getting it—he tells them, “It’s good that I’m going to go away because when I do, you will do much more than when I was with you, because I will give you my Spirit.”

The other thing we see from this very first verse about how personal and intimate the Spirit is the word that comes before this word Advocate (*parakletos*); it’s the word “another.” One of the temptations throughout the ages has been to think of God as three separate beings, that when the Holy Spirit comes, he is unique and apart the Father and Son. It has happened in the church, as well; there have been times when people have been tempted to separate the Spirit from the other two and place truer significance with the Spirit. But this little word that comes before Advocate, the modifier “another,” is the Greek word *allon*, which means “another same.” John could have used the word *heteros*, which means “another different,” but he tells us that the Advocate who is coming is the same as the Son and the Father.

Now why is this important, not only that the Spirit is personal, but that the Spirit is the same? Let me tell you a story. When I was young and unable to drive myself around to school, sports practices, music lessons, youth group meetings, my mom and dad would drive me. Many of you have met Barb and Greg; they’re delightful people, if I do say so.

But there was one thing they used to do every time we stepped out of the car and it used to make me flush with embarrassment. Each and every time we stepped out the car, Greg or Barb would roll down the window and say something to the effect of “remember who you are, Jonathan, and whose you are. God loves you and so do I.” You can imagine how popular this made me with the other middle schoolers. Every time I’d get out of the car, I would think to myself, “Dear Lord, please stop up the ears of everybody within 30 yards, so no one hears this.” Sure enough, God never answered that prayer.

But as I got older and those “drop-offs” became less and less frequent, and the experiences of unsupervised teenage shenanigans became more frequent, something remarkable happened. There was this voice, echoing in the back of my head, often at the most critical and decisive moments telling me, “Jonathan, remember who you are and whose you are; God loves you and so do we.”

Whether they were turning point decision moments or not, whether they were moments of sadness and grief, joy and celebration, whether they were moments of being lost in a day dream, I would hear my Dad’s voice reminding me what I knew was true about myself.

Jesus tells his disciples this is how the Spirit speaks and relates to us, by reminding us the words of promise and hope and salvation that were spoken over us. In John chapter 10 Jesus says, **“I am the good shepherd, and the sheep hear and know the voice of the shepherd.” You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.**

When Jesus tells his disciples, “listen, I am going away, but after I go I am going to send another advocate, a helper” (or as author Dale Bruner puts it, “a true friend”) “to be with you.” The first thing we can see about the work of the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit is there to remind us what is true of ourselves. That’s good, because everywhere you turn out there, someone or something is trying to tell you that who you are is irrelevant, and inconsequential. There is always some gloom or uncertainty bearing down on us, but the Spirit of Christ comforts us.

I love the way Martin Luther puts it, he says: “And now that I know that Christ addresses me in such a friendly way that the Father and the Holy Spirit comfort me so warmly, why should I fret because the devil is angry with me? If he continues, I say to him, Run along and peddle your wares at another market!” Why should I fear if I own this Lord, who promises me that if I believe in Him, the Holy Spirit shall be my comforter and helper?

Jesus sends the Spirit to remind us, comfort, encourage, and draws us back to the very word and work of Jesus in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the indwelling presence of God in the heart of a Christian person. It is the presence that joins us, as members, to the body of Christ. Karl Barth says that how you know that you have the Holy Spirit within you is not that you have some tingling in your tummy or static in your skin; you have the Spirit within you when you are able to say with confidence that yes, God’s love is for me as well. It’s the Spirit that enables you to believe the depths of the theological statement, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

The Holy Spirit does his work by inviting you and me to draw in closer, to move closer to God in faith. And as we are drawn into the very heart of true reality, we hear words, like those of Isaiah, echo through the chambers of our heart: **“Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God...”**

It’s amazing when you personally experience the Holy Spirit, but when that presence grabs hold of a community, that is when groups begin to soar. The second thing we receive from this text is another minute but monumental grammatical point. Every time Jesus uses the pronoun “you” in these verses, and those around them, they are in the plural form. When Jesus says “you” he really means “y’all.” While it’s true that the Holy Spirit comes and meets us individually, when the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit

coming, at least in John's Gospel, it always refers to the Spirit's presence in your fellowship.

The moral of the Story: you cannot and will not experience the full measure of God's Spirit all by yourself. If you want to be a person who knows and experiences the Holy Spirit, get thee to Church! Do not forsake the assembly of believers. Be a loyal member of the local and universal fellowship of believers. Because it is *there* where the Holy Spirit makes his special home on earth.

Take a deep breath.