

Sixth Sunday of Easter
April 27, 2008
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Scriptures: Acts: 17:22-31, Psalm 66:7-18, 1Peter 3:13-22, John 14:15-21

When Pastor asked me if I would fill in today and deliver today's sermon, two thoughts came to mind: 1) Would I be able to do it, and (2) What will the scriptures be.

So I got the verses from Pastor and began to go over them.

As I began to look them over, it was clear that in the Gospel, Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure and letting them know that, though he would no longer be able to be with them, that they would not be left alone, and though he was leaving, he would still be present with them. This caused some confusion and fear on the part of his disciples. But before we take a closer look at the Gospel, let's take a look at Acts and 1Peter because there are great insights about God's Spirit in these readings that add focus to the Gospel message.

The reading from Acts, at first, seemed to be a straightforward narrative of Paul traveling in Athens and being troubled by what he saw. The Greeks worshiped many gods and had many idols, and Paul, having come through so dramatic a conversion on the road to Damascus, could not be still in his spirit. He needed to let these people know of the one true God. Paul was very wise in his approach to introducing this new concept to the Athenians. First, he engaged them in conversation.

Acts **17**

16 While Paul was waiting for them (Silas and Timothy) in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. **17** So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.¹

Fortunately, for Paul the Greeks seemed to be a lot like we are today.

21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)²

And after Paul had opened the lines of communication, no matter how fragile they were, he began to tell the people about the one true God he had discovered.

This is how Paul explained God to the Athenians:

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. **25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath, and everything else.

1 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

2 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

Skipping to verse 27...

27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. **28** 'For in him we live and move and have our being'³

What Paul was trying to tell the people of Athens is that this True God is not tangible he can't be represented by statues or contained in temples because he is a spirit and he wants us to search for him. So I found the tie-in to the Gospel. This theme of God as (God is) spirit.

In 1 Peter, we see something of the activity of God's Spirit. We often speak of God as mysterious and in the Bible, the term the 'Mystery of God' is sometimes used. I think that in 1 Peter we see a glimpse of this mystery through God's Spirit.

This reading opens with Christ admonishing his disciples about suffering for good. Again someone might suspect that if they're suffering for doing 'good' perhaps God is not there for them. It's the same fear the disciples were experiencing when Jesus spoke to them of his departure. Even Jesus uttered such words of abandonment to his Father while on the cross. But Jesus is letting them know that, even in suffering for doing good, God has not abandoned them. Since the world neither knows nor seeks God's Spirit, suffering for doing the right thing (for doing good) might well be expected.

Then we come to verses 18 through 20

1Peter 3

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but **made alive by the Spirit**, **19** **through whom** also he went and preached to the spirits in prison **20** who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.⁴

This activity of the Spirit is a mystery. It doesn't explain how through the Spirit Jesus was able to preach to the spirits in prison. It just says that it was through the Spirit that he was able to do so.

If you read through the Bible, frequently things that you have read before that did not grab your attention in the past can sometimes jump out at you. This happened a few years ago for me.

What I noticed then was the activity of God's Spirit through out the Old and New Testament.

In the very first book of the Old Testament, we find God's spirit at work.

3 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

4 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

Genesis

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² 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. ⁵

God's Spirit was active even at the very beginning.

In the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, we find that the Spirit at work. Sometimes the Spirit prods or warns.

Acts 20:22 Paul says:

²² "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city, the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²

It is even more interesting to read what the Bible says about the Spirit as it pertains to Christ:

John 1:32

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the **Spirit come down and remain** is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." ⁶

From the Everyday Bible

John 3:31 and following:

But the One who comes from heaven is greater than all. He tells what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts what he says. Whoever accepts what he says has proven that God is true. The One whom God sent speaks the words of God, because God gives him the Spirit fully.

The Bible says that God made his Spirit to remain on Christ and that the Spirit was given to him in full measure.

I don't find the Spirit being given this way to anyone else in the Bible.

One of my favorite scriptures about the Spirit that pertains to us today is found in Romans. As Christ took our place on the cross so that we might be forgiven of our sins so the Spirit, in its own way intercedes for us.

⁵ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

⁶ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

Again from the Everyday Bible:

Romans 8:26 & 27:

Also, the Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. God can see what is in people's hearts. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit speaks to God for his people in the way God wants.

These are truly a fraction of the Spirit's activities. The Spirit causes individuals to prophecy, to speak out, to act, to praise and it is given to those who God would strengthen to do His work.

Last week's Gospel directly precedes today's Gospel. There the disciples are filled with fear, and Jesus tells them not to be troubled. Thomas can't figure where Jesus is going and Philip asks Jesus to show the disciples the Father.

John 14

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ⁷

Jesus like Paul is saying to the disciples you are looking for something tangible. Jesus says I have shown you the Father by my example. Jesus is saying he is a true representation of what God is truly like. And that when he leaves he will send a counselor, who will remind you, guide, and be with you in a different way.

Like the disciples, the Spirit is also given to us. It causes us to love and show compassion for others as God has compassion for us. It too causes us to praise God and on occasion gives us insight into how wonderful God truly is.

And so follows today's Gospel:

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to 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,

⁷ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

for he lives with you and will be **in you.** ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

In fact, later in this same Gospel, Jesus says:

John 15:7

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you⁸

God has not abandoned us. He keeps us in mind as the people whom he loves. He has provided for us in the form of the One who takes away sin and His Spirit that will remind us of his love and his plans for us.

Finally, our Psalm starts out with praise for God, and is followed by tribulations that the people had undergone. Yet ultimately, the people realize that God has not abandoned them either. So we too, like the Psalmist, can say:

¹⁶ Come and listen, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.

¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth;
his praise was on my tongue.⁹

²⁰ Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me! ¹⁰

Thank you Lord. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

9 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

10 *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.