

Sermon: Alive in the Spirit

Today is Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday is always celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. As Christians, we say we believe in the Trinity each time we repeat the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed or the UCC Statement of Faith. Yet to explain exactly what the Trinity is, as Bill noted last week, is beyond the ability of most Christians. As a matter of fact, one author I looked at this week said, "Common wisdom is that if you discuss the Trinity for longer than a few minutes, you will slip into heresy."

Now went to Holy Trinity High school in Westfield New Jersey so you would think I would have an inside track on exactly what the Holy Trinity is. You would be wrong. At Holy Trinity we students would ask the nuns intentionally difficult questions sometimes. When we asked them "what is the Trinity?", they would always tell us "it is a great mystery". We always thought when they said that when we asked a question, that they didn't know the answer. Which they did not. But great and learned theologians also do not know the answer, so it is a mystery that we accept as Christians. We accept that we do not know the full nature of God and we never will until we are out of this life.

Yet I was touched by the wonderful testimony Bill Miller gave last week on the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life. In thinking about this sermon, and appreciating Bill Miller's testimony about the Holy Spirit, I wanted to share with you something more with you about the presence of the Holy Spirit in all our lives.

So, what do we know about the Holy Spirit and when do we start to know it? First of all, why do we sometimes use the name Holy Ghost instead of Holy Spirit?? I used to bless myself saying, In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost when I was young. As a child I used to think of the Holy Ghost in terms of Casper the friendly ghost. I don't know how many of you are old enough to remember, Casper the ghost but he was a cute cartoon character that was always helping people. Not a bad connection to make but hardly the great theological mystery that the Holy Ghost actually is but it was, at least, getting at the fact that the Holy Ghost is a real and present thing in our lives.

But why do we say Holy Ghost when we mean Holy Spirit? Actually, the term Holy Ghost comes from an old English translation of the Bible that used the word *gast* for spirit. Which later became Ghost. Like the word spirit, they both refer to the breath and to its life-giving power, thus the Holy Ghost or Spirit.

The Bible, both Old and New Testament can tell us much about the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is mentioned over 90 times. The Holy Spirit came upon people to enable them to accomplish God-given tasks. David declared that "the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" ([2 Sam. 23:2](#)). Ezekiel reported that "the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me" ([Ezek. 2:2](#))., Gideon Samson, and Saul were among others that stated that the Spirit entered them to enable them to do God's will.

The prophet Isaiah of the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be full of the Spirit:
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. (Isiah 11:2-3)

We hear this echoed by Jesus himself in his declaration in the synagogue at Nazareth when he is about to begin his public ministry:

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“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,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”¹⁴

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4: 16-21)

We remember that the accounts of Jesus Baptism by John included the visible descent of the Spirit on Jesus. The Holy Spirit was with Jesus in his earthly life.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in all 4 gospels, the Book of Acts and by St. Paul in his epistles.

The evangelist John spends a great deal of time in his gospel telling us how Jesus repeatedly promised his apostles that when he left them they would have the Holy Spirit as Comforter and guide. John 14: 16-17 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be¹⁵ in you.”

In Matthew 28: 19-20 Jesus gives his disciples the Great Commission just before he leaves at his ascension. He sends them out to bring the world to Christianity. Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have

commanded you. "They are to baptize in the name of the Holy Spirit. This spirit of comfort and guidance is to be given to every new Christian.

In our Baptisms, we were each given this Spirit. A part of one of prayers we can say in a UCC baptism is this: "Baptism is a sacrament...it shows ...the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those whom God has chosen. In Baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the spirit and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always." Later, the minister prays over the child: "The Holy Spirit be upon you, child of God, disciple of Christ, member of the church."

Paul keeps reminding us of this "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

So as the Spirit dwells in us what grace does the Spirit bring into our lives to make us better Christians?

The Holy Spirit keeps us from sin. Romans 8: 26-27 "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."

The Holy Spirit teaches us the ways of Jesus, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Ephesians 17:1)

And the Holy Spirit helps us develop the spiritual gifts that he has given to us. Paul tells us what these spiritual gifts are in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be good and active Christians. Every week in our prayer of confession we ask God to forgive us not for what we have done that is wrong but also for the good we left undone. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to do God's will in this world. He also gives us different gifts so that we must work together in community to do God's work in the world.

Bill said he speaks to the Holy Spirit every day. We all might benefit from such conversations. God is always with us. His Holy Spirit comforts and guides each of us as

he did for the apostles 2,000 years ago. Open yourself to this spiritual treasure which is a gift from Jesus directly to you.

And may the Holy Spirit bless you, guide you, comfort you and keep you all the days of your life.

Amen