

“Creed: I Believe in the Holy Spirit”

Date: July 15, 2018

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Creed, series

Theme: Holy Spirit

Texts: Galatians 5:16-25; John 14:8-10, 16-17

During these weeks of summer, we’ve been working our way through the Apostles’ Creed. We come now to the Christian confession of faith in the Holy Spirit. After talking about the many lines of the Creed dealing with Jesus, this statement about the Holy Spirit feels out of balance and almost anemic: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

But, as we will see, this is the most understated line in the Creed. Today we will consider *who* the Holy Spirit is, *what* the Holy Spirit does, and *why* the Holy Spirit matters.

When I was growing up, the church used to call the third person of the Trinity the *Holy Ghost*. Perhaps it was because people were confusing the Holy Ghost with another friendly ghost by the name of Casper that they changed the name. However, when we sing the doxology today, we still say, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.”

The image of ghost is not meant to refer to a haunting, but rather to a non-physical presence. The word ghost implies personhood and is helpful that way. The word spirit gets away from pagan notions of people flying around without their bodies. Some traditional Catholics and Anglicans still say “Holy Ghost,” and either one is correct.

When we speak about the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, we are speaking of God’s active work in our lives; of God’s way of leading us, guiding us, forming and shaping us; of God’s power and presence to comfort and encourage us, and to make us the people God wants us to be.

The Spirit of God is the voice of God whispering, wooing and beckoning us. And in listening to this voice and being shaped by this power, we find that we become most fully and authentically human.

The word *spirit* shows us up about 500 times in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word usually translated as “spirit” is *ruach*. In the New Testament the Greek word is *pneuma*. The words have multiple meanings including breath, air, wind, and of course spirit. Bible translators have to decide, based on the context, which English word best corresponds to the text.

There are 80 to 90 references to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. While the Spirit is often described in the OT as empowering and giving special gifts and abilities, the Spirit’s most frequent work is ensuring that God’s voice is heard, so that God’s will and purpose can be conveyed and understood.

When we move to the New Testament there are too many mentions of the Spirit to recount them all this morning. I’ll mention just a few. Before his death, in John 14, Jesus told his disciples that he would not leave them alone but would send the Spirit, to guide them, comfort them, and remind them of the things he had taught them.

Just before Jesus left this earth, he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem and he would send the Spirit. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The key difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament understandings of the Spirit is that most often in the OT, the Spirit’s work is for the special and gifted leaders of Israel. Whereas, in the

New Testament, it is the unremarkable and ordinary people who receive God's Spirit. It is meant for *all* followers of Jesus Christ.

Adam Hamilton, in his book *Creed*, says the following: "I think many Christians live Spirit-deficient lives, a bit like someone who is sleep-deprived, nutrient deprived, or oxygen-deprived. Many Christians haven't been taught about the Spirit, nor encouraged to seek the Spirit's work in their lives. As a result, our spiritual lives are a bit anemic as we try living the Christian life by our own power and wisdom." End of quote. (page 89)

I agree with him. For too many of us, we listen to the words of Jesus and we think his teaching is just too hard to follow. So we ignore him. We depend on his grace to forgive us our shortcomings, rather than seek the power of the Holy Spirit to do what he commanded us to do.

On our own, we can do very little. But empowered by the Spirit, we can do mighty things. The Spirit convicts us and quickens our conscience when we're doing wrong. The Spirit, through persistent nudges, urges us to act selflessly in our care of others. The Spirit makes us long to be more than we are at the present moment, and to become more like the people God intended us to be.

Paul describes the Spirit's work and its impact on our lives as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." How different is this fruit than the fruit of my own heart, and the culture around me. *This* is why our belief in and our experience of the Holy Spirit matters.

You have no doubt experienced the Holy Spirit, and may not have known it. Christians believe the Holy Spirit is at work all around us, all of

the time. I often feel a nudge to do something, to see someone, to make a phone call to someone I haven't spoken with in some time.

I've learned to pay attention when I feel that nudge. Often times, God has placed me in a situation where I was needed at that very moment. I know that many of you have experienced this in your own life. And if we had time, I would love to hear your stories of how the Spirit put you in a situation, at exactly the right time and place as you needed to be there.

There are times when some flash of insight comes to me, that I'd never thought of before, and I often believe this is the work of the Holy Spirit. There are moments when I feel the presence of God in my life in the form of warmth, love or a sense of peace.

Many people speak about a special presence that they feel during or after a worship service. I believe that is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work. Often times after worship, I'll hear from some of you who say, "I feel like your message was just for me today – it was exactly what I needed to hear." I believe this too is the Holy Spirit at work, using my feeble words as a vehicle to speak to God's people.

I believe the Holy Spirit is always at work in our lives, but we are often too busy to hear or to notice. We will become more sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit as we spend more time with God in quiet. My experience is that the Holy Spirit whispers rather than shouts. And I can better hear the voice of the Spirit when I'm quiet than when I'm busy.

There are many voices, today, clamoring for our attention: voices on the radio, television, social media, print media and all around us. I invite you to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and to invite the Spirit to be at work in you – comforting, guiding, shaping, and empowering you.

If you've never prayed to receive the Holy Spirit, I invite you to pray with me. Once again, let us pray our opening prayer:

“Come, Holy Spirit, I need you. Breath of God, fill me wholly and completely. Form and shape me into the person you want me to be. Lead me to do what you want me to do. Empower me and use me; speak to me and through me. Produce your fruit in me. Help me to listen to your voice above all other voices that clamor for my attention. Come, Holy Spirit, I need you. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why*, by Adam Hamilton, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, pp. 79-105.