

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**May 12, 2024, Ascension Sunday**

Joel 2:28-29; Acts 1:1-9; John 14:15-18, 25-27; 16:7-15

**Sermon Series: Come Holy Spirit: Our Helper, Advocate, Comforter, and Friend—  
God's Great Plan of Love**

*"The Holy Spirit is the daily felt experiential presence of God, who will never leave me or forsake me."* (Lectio 365 App, 4-2-24)

Prayer before the Sermon "Creator God, who formed humanity from dust, breathe in us again. Revive us and sanctify us by the power of Your Spirit. Set our hearts on fire with the good news of Your gospel." And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen. (Lectio 365, Thursday May 9, 2024)

During the month of May we are spending time with God's Holy Spirit. As I told you last week, I think many churches including ours only talk about the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and we are missing out on a big part of who our God of love is.

This morning, we are continuing to meet, befriend, and come to love the Holy Spirit of God who is our Helper, Advocate, Comforter, and Friend that God has sent to us.

The Holy Spirit, who lives in our hearts is part of God's great plan of love in your life, in mine and in the world's.

This week as I spent time focusing on the Holy Spirit, I was once again moved by how much God loves us and loves the world. I felt like I was once again watching God love unfold for us, from the beginnings of creation. We are so loved, and it becomes so evident when we review just a few of the stories of how God has cared for us.

God, who in God's great plan of love, breathed God's Holy Spirit over the waters of creation, was with us from before the beginning of time.

In God's great plan of love God's Spirit breathed into God's creations, into God's creatures, into God's people. The breath and Spirit of God in each of us from the beginning.

God, who in God's great plan of love sent Jesus to love and save us, telling Mary his mother, through the Angel Gabriel, that *the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and she would conceive in her womb and bear a son, and she would name him Jesus. and he would be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.* (Luke 1:26-38)

God, who in God's great plan of love, appeared as the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism, hovering over the waters of the Jordan River as Jesus came up out of the water. And God spoke and said, *this is my Beloved with him I am well pleased,* and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove alighted on Jesus. The Holy Trinity there at the Jordan. (Luke 3:21-22)

In God's great plan of love, Jesus lived on earth, taught his disciples and the crowds, he healed the sick, he welcomed everyone, even those whom no one in the religious world had ever welcomed before, and as the end drew near and his crucifixion on the cross became inevitable, he told his disciples:

*"I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."* (John 16:7)

In God's great plan of love, the Holy Spirit coming to the disciples and to us was part of God's

story for us. Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit in love.

In God's great plan of love, Jesus knew that the time was coming when he would die on the cross for the sins of the world, and rise to new life on the third day, and he knew that in God's timing he would ascend to heaven, which is celebrated on this Sunday each year. With the deep and abiding love of his heart he said to his disciples and the women and other men who had travelled with him for those three years, *"I will not leave you orphaned."* (John 14:18) In the midst of the sorrow of his impending death Jesus promised his disciples that the comfort of his love and the great love of God would always be with them. They would be without him on earth, but they would not ever be alone without the presence of God, because the Holy Spirit would always be with them.

Jesus said to them: *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you."* (John 14:16-17) God's great plan of love became overwhelming to me this week as I realized that the God who created the heavens and the earth and walked in creation with our earliest mothers and fathers, then came to earth in Jesus, and then when Jesus returned to Heaven, that same God stayed on earth in the disciples and in you and in me by taking up residence in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

God, in God's great plan of love, has always chosen to make a home with God's people on earth, in creation, in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit.

We, who are God's beloved children, are also not left as orphans, and in God's great plan of love, the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth comes to us and lives and abides in us, in our hearts. What amazing love this is that God loves us so much, that God has always made a way to live inside our hearts and lives. It is a grace we cannot take for granted. God has given us an Advocate to be with us forever.

And this name "Advocate" has many meanings for us, and I invite you to listen to them not as vocabulary words but as words that will help you get to know the Spirit of God who lives in your heart. In God's great plan of love,

The Holy Spirit is our Helper.

Let yourself sit for a moment with where in your life you need help.

Now in this silence ask the Holy Spirit your Helper to be there in that place with you. Let us pray...Amen.

In God's great plan of love, the Holy Spirit is your Advocate who stands up for you and stands with you.

Let yourself sit for a moment with where in your life you need an advocate, a champion, a defender.

Now in this silence ask the Holy Spirit your Advocate to be there in that place with you. Let us pray...Amen.

In God's great plan of love, the Holy Spirit is your Comforter.

Let yourself sit for moment with where in your life you need comfort.

Now in this silence ask the Holy Spirit your Comforter to be there in that place with you. Let us pray...Amen.

In God's great plan of Love, the Holy Spirit is your Friend. (*NIRV, The Message translations*)

Let yourself sit for moment with where in your life you need a holy friend.

Now in this silence ask the Holy Spirit your Friend to be there in that place with you. Let us pray...Amen.

In God's great plan of love the Holy Spirit will be with us forever, living in our hearts, our Helper, Advocate, Comforter, and Friend, *who will teach us and bring to mind all that Jesus has taught us (John 14: 16)*. We are not orphans, but children of God,

And in God's great plan of love, oh how deeply we are loved.

Let us give all thanks and praise to our triune God who is our Creator, our Savior, and the Holy Spirit who lives in our Hearts, ALLELUIA, AMEN.