

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, March 8, 2015**

**THE ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH (8):
THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

John 16:7-15

John and Jean Beatty were a retired couple in our church in Pennsylvania who held a special place in our hearts. John was one of the elders of the church. They had no children of their own, but they served as surrogate grandparents for our kids during the years we lived in Altoona.

With a twinkle in his eye, John once told me a story about a man visiting a church whose worship style, you might say, was rather stuffy and solemn. At different points in the service, this visitor broke out in a loud “Hallelujah!” or “Praise the Lord!” – much to the annoyance and consternation of the church members. Finally, after several outbursts of this sort, one of the elders went over to him and said: “I’m going to have to ask you to stop doing that. If you don’t, we’ll have to ask you to leave.”

The visitor replied: “I can’t help it! I’ve got the Spirit!”

To which the elder, stating the obvious, replied: “Well, you didn’t get it here!”

I want to say two things in response to this story. First, as we said last Sunday, the Holy Spirit is not an “it.” The Holy Spirit is not a thing of any kind. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or power. The Holy Spirit is a living personal being, the third person of the Trinity. Like God the Father and God the Son, the Holy Spirit is God. One God in three persons, eternally existing and co-equal in deity, dignity, power, and honor.

Second, if you don’t have the Spirit, it is my sincere hope and prayer that you will “get” the Spirit here today. Right here. Right now. My hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit will take hold of you as never before and fill you with the fullness of His presence and power. My prayer is that you – that we – will be filled with the Spirit, as the Bible exhorts us in Ephesians 5:18. My prayer is that your heart may be open to God totally, so that by the Holy Spirit, He may fill you with His own fullness, with the fullness of His love and grace, His righteousness and truth, and produce in your life the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is always in season.

Shouting “Hallelujah!” or saying “Amen!” is not the only kind of evidence there is to point to the Holy Spirit’s presence in a person’s life. But I want you to know that if you feel like letting out a “Hallelujah” or an “Amen!”, or if you want to lift up your hands in praise to the Lord, it’s okay. More than okay.

THE HOLY SPIRIT OUR PARACLETE

Last Sunday we looked at what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. Four times in the space of three chapters in the Gospel of John (John 14-16), Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the “Paraclete” who would come alongside His disciples not only to be with them, but to take up residence *in* them, in their hearts, and in *us*, in *our* hearts, in the hearts of men and women and girls and boys everywhere who believe the gospel and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives.

As we noted last Sunday, in most English Bible translations, the word “Paraclete” is translated as Helper, or Counselor, or Comforter. Other words, such as Adviser, Advocate, Ally, and Champion also capture something of the meaning of “Paraclete.” In using this word “Paraclete” to describe the Holy Spirit, Jesus is saying it is the role or function of the Spirit to come alongside His followers (including us today) to give help, comfort, counsel, encouragement, guidance, protection, power, and strength both moral and spiritual to face the challenges of life – the trials, troubles and temptations, the dangers, toils and snares, the cares and fears we so often carry around with us.

What does this mean, in practical terms, for us as followers of Jesus? Let’s start with this: If you’re in school – elementary, middle school, high school, college, or grad school – it means the Holy Spirit goes to school with you. The Holy Spirit is God present with you at every moment. Wherever you go. The Holy Spirit is alive and at work in you to give you strength and help and hope and wisdom, *if* you will let Him. It’s a big *if*. You can ignore Him, if you choose. You can resist Him. You can run from Him, if you choose. The Holy Spirit will not force Himself on you. But you should think very carefully before choosing to push the Holy Spirit away. The choices you make have consequences. If you choose to live as though God has nothing to do with your life on a daily basis, you will miss out on the truly amazing blessings of knowing God personally and watching how He works.

Here is a question for your consideration: How would your school day be different if you knew the Holy Spirit were right there with you, even living in you, the whole time? How would your relationships with friends be different? How would your life at home be different if you were aware that God is with you in the person of the Holy Spirit at every moment? How would your view of yourself be changed?

This applies to all of us in whatever stage of life we find ourselves. Young, middle-aged, AARP-eligible, working, retired, unemployed, single, married, widowed, divorced, raising children, enjoying grandchildren, longing for children or grandchildren, healthy, not so healthy, well off financially, not so well off. How would your life be different if you lived each day in the continual awareness of the presence and enabling power of God the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete promised by Jesus? If you are spiritually alive through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is *with* you and lives *in* you. Right now. And He will never leave you or forsake you. You have His word on it (Hebrews 13:5)

JESUS OUR PARACLETE

The one other place in the New Testament where the word “paraclete” occurs is in 1 John 2:1, where it refers not to the ministry of the Holy Spirit but to the work of Jesus Himself on our behalf. Beginning in 1:8, John writes: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us” (1:8-10). Then, continuing in 2:1-2, he says: “My dear children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin” – and we all do – “we have an advocate with the Father” – that is, a Paraclete, a defense attorney who represents us in the court of heaven – “Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world.”

Jesus, the eternal Son of God who became man and willingly gave up His life as the all-sufficient, once for all, atoning sacrifice for our sins, is now our heavenly Paraclete, our representative at the bar of God’s justice. Which means we have nothing to worry about, because Jesus has already done everything for us and for our salvation.

The “God-with-us” ministry begun by Jesus in the days of His incarnation is now continued here on earth by the Holy Spirit, the divine Paraclete sent from heaven to be with us and to live in us. Forever (John 14:16).

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. TO GLORIFY JESUS

There are several aspects of the Holy Spirit’s ministry I want to quickly mention this morning. First, and most importantly, the primary, supreme mission of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus (John 16:14) by making Him known, by testifying about Him (15:26), and by teaching the truth about Jesus in and through the Scriptures (14:26; 16:13). The Holy Spirit doesn’t go around calling attention to Himself. “His role and His joy,” writes J. I. Packer, is to increase and deepen our fellowship with both the Father and the Son “by glorifying the Son as the object for our faith and then witnessing to our adoption through the Son into the Father’s family” (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 92).

Put another way, the main ministry of the Holy Spirit is to cause us to turn the eyes of our hearts upon Jesus, and to keep our eyes fixed on Him. When Mary Sue and I were in Fort Lauderdale recently, we enjoyed a water taxi ride one evening on the intercoastal waterway, which took us past some incredibly luxurious yachts and some large, beautiful homes, many – most – of which had floodlights trained on them to show off their beauty.

The Holy Spirit has what you might call a “floodlight ministry” in relation to the person and work of Jesus. Floodlights are not there to call attention to themselves but to the homes or buildings or other objects they are there to illumine. The Holy Spirit functions in this way as “the hidden floodlight shining on the Savior.” The Spirit does not shine the light on Himself. As Packer points out, the message of the Spirit is never: “Look at me; listen to me; come to

me; get to know me.” It is always: “Look at *Him* (Jesus) and see His glory; listen to *Him* and receive His word; go to *Him* and have life in all its fullness; get to know *Him* and taste the gifts of His grace and love.” (See Packer, 65-66).

The supreme role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus Christ by pointing us to Him as our Savior and Lord, and by teaching us the truth of the gospel and its implications for all of life in and through the Scriptures.

2. TO CONVICT US OF SIN

Second, as Jesus said in John 16:8, it is the Holy Spirit’s role to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” The Holy Spirit exposes our sin, convicts us of the unrighteousness of our ways, and shows us the judgment we rightly deserve. He shows us our sin and our need for a Savior. He calls a world full of sinners to repent, to renounce our sin and to turn away from it. And He draws us to the Savior in trusting faith.

3. NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST

Third, in drawing us to the Savior, the Holy Spirit makes us new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), applying the saving work of Christ to our hearts, giving new life to us and to all who believe, who were, in the words of Paul, “dead in (our) transgressions and sins” and “by nature objects of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1-5). It is the Holy Spirit who breathes new life – eternal life – into our hearts through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ our Savior.

4. POWER FOR LIFE AND WITNESS

Fourth, as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit gives us power – power for witness and power to live the Christian life. In Acts 1:8, just before He went up into heaven, Jesus said to His disciples: “You will receive power” – the word Jesus used is *dunamis*, from which we get the word *dynamite* – “when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses.”

You know what the role of a witness is. In a court of law, witnesses are asked to testify to what they have seen with their own eyes or heard with their own ears, what they have experienced personally and thus know to be true. The first followers of Jesus bore witness to Him in this way. They were able to say of Jesus in a way we cannot: “We saw Him with our own eyes. We heard Him with our own ears. We were eyewitnesses of the things we proclaim to you.”

Even though we are 20 centuries removed from the days of Jesus’ earthly sojourn, we are still called to be His witnesses. And the Holy Spirit gives us power to witness – power to share with people near and far – in our “Jerusalem,” right here in northern Virginia, to the ends of the earth – the gospel message of the saving love of Jesus, which we ourselves know in our own experience to be real and true, and the wonder-working power of His amazing, all-sufficient grace that still today comes free of charge to people who don’t deserve it and never will. Like you and me.

The Holy Spirit also gives us power to live the Christian life. Without the Holy Spirit, the Christian life is impossible. Not difficult or challenging, but utterly and totally impossible. Without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, it simply cannot be done. Why? Because the Christian life is a supernatural life that requires supernatural power.

One of the church membership questions we ask every person who desires to become a member of Faith is this: Do you now promise and resolve, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?

The key to this question – the key to living life as a Christian – is humble reliance upon the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. That is the only way it works. We simply cannot do it on our own, no matter how hard we try.

In John 15, Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to describe our relationship to Him. “Apart from me,” He says, “you can do nothing” (John 15:5). *Nothing*. So it is. Cut off from Him – cut off from the current of the Holy Spirit which gives life, nourishment, and power – we are powerless to live a life that pleases God.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives us power for witness and power to live as followers of Jesus in a fallen world.

5. GIFTS FOR SERVICE

Fifth, the Holy Spirit gives us gifts – *charismata* – to be used in God’s service. Paul writes about these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. Peter speaks of them as well in 1 Peter 4. The main idea is that the Holy Spirit gives every believer some gift(s) to be exercised in witness or ministry for the glory of God and for the common good, for building up the church or for service to others in the name of Jesus. These gifts are not to be confused with our natural abilities, though God may well give us spiritual gifts that utilize or enhance our natural gifts and abilities. These spiritual gifts are special enablings by which the Holy Spirit works through ordinary people like us to minister in some way to someone or even many “someones” in the name of Jesus.

6. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Let me mention just one more aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Maybe it would be more proper to speak of this as one of the results of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. I’m talking about the “fruit of the Spirit” that Paul identifies in Galatians 5:22-23: “The fruit of the Spirit,” says Paul, “is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

These are qualities of a Christ-like character that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives as we grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and mature in our faith. Rarely does the Holy Spirit produce this fruit in our lives instantaneously or overnight. Could He, if He so desired? Of course He could. He could do it in less than a nanosecond. He is able. More than able.

But usually the Holy Spirit chooses to grow and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in us gradually, measure by measure.

You may find this process frustrating, even infuriatingly slow at times, because you want the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit in your life, and you want it now. You want the fruit of patience, for example, and you want it right now. You don't want to wait for it. Trust me, I understand. But this is not the way the Holy Spirit usually does His sanctifying work in us.

In order to bear the fruit of the Spirit, the Bible calls us to “live by the Spirit” and to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25), which means, among other things: Let God have His way in your life. Be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and live a Spirit-filled life. Let the Holy Spirit continue to speak to you in and through the Scriptures. Love what God loves. Love the way God loves. Grieve the things that grieve the heart of God. Employ your gifts in God's service with energy, intelligence, enthusiasm, and love. And let God use you as His witness wherever you are and wherever you go. “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

Nothing would make the Holy Spirit happier than this. *Soli Deo Gloria*. To God alone be the glory. May Jesus Christ be praised. Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.