

**Sermon Series: “I Believe in...”    Sermon Title: “The Holy Spirit”**  
**Genesis 1:1-3; Psalm 104:27-30; Isaiah 61:1-3a;**  
**Luke 4:1-2a; 14-19; John 14:11-17; 25-26; Acts 2:1-4; 14-17; Romans 5:1-5**  
**Salem United Methodist Church; August 11, 2019**  
**Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling**

For the past two weeks, we have been working our way through the Apostles’ Creed to deepen our understanding of who God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is. The Creed was developed from the second through the fourth centuries to codify for the church the concept of One God in three persons: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit and identify Jesus as God’s Son. Today our focus is seeking an understanding of the Holy Spirit, along with the role it plays in the Bible as well as in our lives. The Holy Spirit receives one line in the Creed in comparison to the numerous lines Jesus receives. It seems unfair until we reread the entire verse about Jesus and discover that the Spirit has been involved in every aspect of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy Your consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

There is a cacophony of voices competing for our attention. There are the voices from the media, from people with whom we interact, and from our past. Some of these voices are encouraging and uplifting. Some distract us from what is important. And some voices demean, belittle, and even dehumanize. Voices from our past, especially negative voices rattle around in our minds, reminding us when we were called stupid, useless, or no good. These negative voices tend to drown out the more positive and encouraging voices. We choose which voices from the past we allow in our heads, which voices we will kick out, and which voices to turn a deaf ear. And in real life we choose which voices we will allow to impact what we believe and how we live. We choose which voices we hear and which we will tune out.

There is one voice that is constantly calling to us, wooing us toward God, leading us, guiding us, encouraging us, empowering us, and re-creating us. And that voice is the Holy Spirit which has always existed with God, as God. In Genesis, the Spirit of God was present at Creation, breathing life into us. (Note: I will be using the terms, Holy Spirit and Spirit of God, interchangeably. However, the Hebrew Scriptures refer to Spirit of God whereas the New Testament uses Holy Spirit.) The Spirit of God both called and equipped Abraham, Moses, David, and a host of other Hebrew leaders. The Spirit of God gave these leaders strength and wisdom to lead the people for God’s purposes. The Psalms repeatedly give praise for the Spirit of God and pray to God’s Spirit. And the Spirit of God spoke through the prophets, calling the people back into relationship with God and to live according to God’s law.

Then in the New Testament the Holy Spirit comes upon Mary as she conceives the Son of God, Jesus. At Jesus’ baptism the Holy Spirit descends like a dove on Jesus. This same Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tested to see if he can do his new job, being the Messiah. Later Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah in his home synagogue and declares that the Spirit of Lord has anointed him. And right before Jesus is arrested and crucified, he tells his followers that God will send the Holy Spirit to them. The Greek word, Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John is *paraclete*. No, he wasn’t referring to a pair of sports shoes with spikes or a little yellow bird. The word, *paraclete*, comes from two Greek words, *para*, which means alongside or very near and *kalein* which means to call. The word has been translated as Advocate or Defender. In legal terms a defense attorney is a *paraclete* who stands with the defendant and advocates his/her innocence. Also, there is a tactical body-armor company called The *Paraclete*. The company’s name infers that one wants their body-armor “very near” to protect from bullets. A *paraclete* is also one who walks with people offering them comfort when they are hurting. In addition to being called the Advocate, the Holy Spirit has also been called the Comforter. Even the intent of Jesus’ words from John’s Gospel is to comfort the followers as they experience the upcoming Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. Next, we witness the Holy Spirit blowing upon these same followers after the ascension of Jesus and empowering them to do things that they could not do before. They can now speak in other languages so that they could share the news about Jesus. After receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter, an uneducated fisherman from the countryside, preaches about Jesus to

the crowds in the capital city. Later Paul writes in his letters about the transformative power of the Holy Spirit that can change each person as we receive the love of God within.

As we take this brief walk tracing the steps of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, we find that the same Spirit that was present at Creation, the same Spirit that led the Hebrew leaders, the same Spirit who conceived Jesus, baptized him, and anointed him to preach, teach, and heal, the same Spirit who came to the disciples to empower them so they could continue with the ministry of Jesus is the same Spirit that is calling each of us, coming to each of us, wooing each of us toward God, leading each of us, walking with each of us, giving each of us strength and wisdom, encouraging each of us, filling each heart and kindling in each of us the fire of God's love. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is constantly trying to get our attention, hold our hands as we walk, and touch our hearts and minds so that we can be recreated to live like Christ and love like Christ. To further understand the ethereal image of the Holy Spirit, we use analogies. The Holy Spirit in the Bible has been described as a dove, a wind, and tongues of fire. Another analogy is comparing the Holy Spirit to electrical current. It is constantly accessible, but we have to plug into it. Or radio waves, they are constantly in the air, but we have to tune our radios to hear them. Or wi-fi which are radio waves that connect our devices to the internet. These radio waves are always emitting, but can only connect when our devices are on the correct setting with the correct password. When we set our devices to connect to the wi-fi, we have access to the most powerful source of information in the history of humankind. So, it is with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit like the radio waves is in search to connect with us. If we don't have our settings set to connect to the wi-fi, we don't have access to the most powerful source of guidance and love in all creation. However, this analogy breaks down because the Holy Spirit is even more powerful than radio waves. The Holy Spirit can connect with us even when we aren't connecting! The Holy Spirit can guide us even when we aren't aware of this guidance. The theological term for this is Prevenient Grace: the grace of God that goes before us, inviting us nudging us, beckoning us to get to know who Jesus is. Then when we become aware and begin to trust in Jesus, begin to connect with God, the Spirit works to reconcile us to God. Next, the Spirit of God begins the work to re-create us to be the person God always intended us to be, people who are loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and have self-control. The Spirit of God seeks to perfect us in love so we can serve God's purposes of justice and care for the hurting and the least among us.

The Spirit of God is within each of us whether we are aware of it or not. The Spirit may wake us up to a need or a particular mission. We choose if we want to ignore the Spirit's invitation or act on it. We are to trust in the Spirit and obey. If we accept the mission, the Spirit will provide what we need to fulfill the mission. This doesn't mean that we won't have challenges along the way, but we will never be alone. Have you ever felt that you were to do something, had a nudge or a prompting? One of the traits of the Holy Spirit is perseverance. The Holy Spirit never gives up on us. And if we won't act, the Holy Spirit will find someone else to do the work.

Adam Hamilton tells of a time in which he disobeyed a nudge that he had from God. A member of his congregation was in the hospital. He felt a nudge to get up in the middle of the night and go to the hospital, but he went back to sleep. Later he found out that another member of his congregation received a nudge to go the hospital about the same time, and she went. When she got there, she found out that the person was dying. She sat with the family and prayed with them while their family member died. Adam was humbled by the fact that he ignored the nudge. After all that the Holy Spirit has done, is doing, and will be doing for us, why would we ignore a nudge of the Spirit of God? I am as guilty of that as the next person of ignoring a nudge from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we ignore a Holy Spirit nudge because we may be afraid of what the Holy Spirit may ask of us. We may be afraid that the Holy Spirit will yank us out of our comfort zones so we block out the voice of the Spirit. How do you block out the voice of the Holy Spirit and why?

Part of our Communion liturgy is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on us to make us be the Body of Christ redeemed by his blood. We pray for the Holy Spirit to transform us into living like Christ who redeems all of us, who loves and unites all of us. As a people of God, we need the Holy Spirit to transform our world into one that is loving and kind, to heal the hurts, and comfort those in pain. We need the Holy Spirit so we pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, fall afresh on me." Amen.

**Resources:** *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why* by Adam Hamilton; *Christian Theology* by Alister McGrath; *The United Methodist Hymnal*

