

“THE PERSONAL SPIRIT.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

May 15, 2016, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; II Corinthians 6:16; John 14:16

Prayer: Holy Father, we call out to you this morning as a people in a dry and thirsty land who desire spiritual food and water. We are sinners in need of a very great Savior and a very present and powerful Holy Spirit. Through your Word and sacrament, fall afresh upon us and help us for the sake of your glory and your gospel. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The Personal Spirit.

Someone asked Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, if God existed. He replied, "The question is not relevant. If there were a God, man could not comprehend him anyway. So what good would it be to have such a God?"

He believed there was no way for God to be personal and knowable. He is not alone. When Hindus or even some Jews talk about God they are thinking of an influence or an impersonal force or an energy source of some kind that radiates from some place out there.

Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons think of the Holy Spirit as like magnetism or electricity or gravity. They aren't thinking of a person with personal characteristics and personality. Whatever it is it's impersonal, without knowledge or emotion.

The idea that there is a God and that this God is a personal God is foreign to all other religions. It's one thing to consider God is a spirit, but to consider Him to be a personal Spirit is an altogether different matter. That's a game changer.

I know that we don't generally think of the Bible as having much comedy in it but the one place you find it is in the prophets when they write about other gods and idols. They use a mocking and sarcastic tone as they make fun of people worshiping objects they have made themselves.

Isaiah 44:14-17 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. 16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

The irony here is meant to be comical. Really. Doesn't anyone stop long enough to question themselves, "I am bowing down and worshipping and talking to a block of wood that I cut and fashioned myself"?

God is not a concept we thought up, God is not an energy source we tap into. God is a person and God is personal and that's true of all three persons of the Holy Trinity including the Holy Spirit. Let me sum up the evidence from Scripture.

The Holy Spirit speaks, listens, teaches, inspires, guides, convicts, comforts, and encourages. He can be lied to and grieved. All these traits are functions of personality. Jesus always refers to Him with the personal pronouns He and Him, never the impersonal pronoun it.

The Indwelling Spirit.

Scripture says we are a temple of the Holy Spirit, meaning that God is in us in a special and particular way, God chooses and delights to live in the bodies of His children, those who believe in and trust Jesus for their salvation.

Suppose someone very famous or rich or powerful wanted to stay in your home. You would consider that an honor. So consider the honor that is bestowed on us as followers of Jesus Christ that God would want to dwell in us and take up His residence in us.

Jesus went to heaven so that He could send His Holy Spirit to be with us all. In the flesh Jesus could only be in one place at a time. If He was in Jerusalem, He couldn't be in Capernaum.

By leaving the earth Jesus exchanged His physical presence with us so that His spiritual presence could be with all of us on earth at the same time, which is much better.

When we think of the blessings of God, when we consider all His gifts, when we think about all the good things He has done for us, what is the greatest and the best?

The people of Israel were blessed with a blessing that no other nation had, they had something that set them utterly apart from every other group of people. The God of Israel personally dwelt in the midst of His people.

All the other nations had their idols and symbols meant to represent their otherwise far away gods. But Israel's God was personal and present and dwelt among them in the pillar of cloud and fire, in the tabernacle and temple. God was with them.

The very presence of our personal God is the greatest blessing we can have from God. God is with us in the deepest and most powerful and most intimate way possible. God could not do better for us.

The Holy Spirit is the personal presence and power of God with us and in us. One of the goals of the Christian life is to become more aware of the personal presence and power of God in us.

We are not our own, we are bought with a very high price, we are no longer free to do whatever we want. We belong to another. It matters now more than ever what we do, what we say, what we watch, what we wear, how we act and react.

Glorify God with your body. It is the dwelling place of God.

The Working Spirit.

The personal Spirit has a personal ministry, a personal work that He does in us and for us.

The work of the Holy Spirit on earth is to manifest the active presence of God in the world and in the church and in the individual believer. The Spirit carries on the work of the Father and the Son. The Spirit is God present, God active, God working.

The Spirit empowers, giving life and sustaining that life.

The Spirit purifies, cleanses, sanctifies.

The Spirit reveals, makes known, guides and directs God's people.

The Spirit unifies, making our fellowship with God and each other possible.

The Spirit gives evidence of the presence and blessing of God.

The Spirit gives us supernatural strength to endure great trials and hardship and affliction.

The Spirit gives us supernatural comfort to bear great grieves and losses and pain.

The Spirit gives us supernatural peace that defies human comprehension.

The Spirit gives us supernatural faith and trust and hope in the darkest of seasons.

The Spirit gives us supernatural confidence in the scariest places.

The Spirit gives us supernatural wisdom and insight and glimpses of truth from heaven.

The Spirit gives us supernatural assurance of eternal life.

With the Spirit indwelling you, every word, every thought, and every deed is in His view.

The Holy Spirit knows you. He knows your strengths and your weaknesses.

He knows your sinful acts and your holy deeds. He knows you better than you do.

If some great person were coming to your house what would you do to prepare, how would you clean up and repair and get rid of clutter and trash? You would do your best to have your home in top condition.

At the beginning when the Holy Spirit first comes to take hold of our lives, He does the cleaning and fixing and repairing and getting rid of the trash, of all that defiles. He cleans us up by convicting us of hidden sin, showing us our unrighteousness, exposing what is evil.

But this is only the beginning of a lifelong process. His ongoing work is to convict and cleanse and clean up. And in this work we cooperate and participate. It's a hard and holy work.

We have seen and experienced just how personal God is, He has shown His grace time and time again. We are confident of His grace for the future. He is with us always. Speaking of that...

The Forever Spirit.

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, *to be with you forever.*

I hadn't noticed this before. This is the absolute security of the true believer in Christ. To those to whom the Spirit is given, He will never, no never, leave or forsake. He is our sign and seal.

This is a guarantee that has no expiration date. Once you have received the fullness of the Holy Spirit the only time you can lose Him is when forever stops, when eternity ends.

In heaven the Spirit will continue to keep us holy.

In heaven the Spirit will continue to teach us the inexhaustible riches of Christ Jesus.

In heaven the Spirit will continue to keep us in perfect fellowship with the Father and the Son.

In heaven the Spirit will continue to strengthen and protect and preserve the unity of believer.

The Spirit is the basis of our security and confidence and assurance of salvation. The Spirit is the forever gift of God, the gift that keeps on giving.

Implications and Application.

How do you think of the Holy Spirit? Do you ever think about Him? Do you seek to know Him? Do you rely on Him, depend on Him? Do you have any interest in Him?

Do you believe you are a temple of the living, holy God?

Do you believe the Spirit of the eternal, living God dwells in you?

Do you sense His power and presence?

If not, why not? Are you ignoring, neglecting, quenching or grieving Him?

Are you living for yourself and by yourself, in your own strength and understanding?

Do you have the Holy Spirit?

I Corinthians 12:3 I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

Do you say that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord? Do you claim Him as your Savior from sin? If repentance from sin in the name of Jesus and faith in Jesus are a regular part of your life and worship, then you have the Holy Spirit.

It is common to hear people talk about accepting Jesus as their personal Savior. What they don't realize is apart from the personal Holy Spirit there is no personal Savior. We are Christians only because of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Spirit Jesus is dead to us and we are dead to Jesus.

You can go to church every Sunday, you can give money in the offering, you can sing the hymns, you can say the words of the creed, you can understand my sermons and even believe good Reformed theology, but if you don't have the Holy Spirit you are not a Christian and you are not going to heaven. It is that plain.

Do you have the Holy Spirit? If you don't, ask and God will give you the greatest gift, and with that gift will come all of God's other gifts.

At this table we encounter the real, personal, spiritual presence of Jesus by His Spirit. At this table He feeds us with His strength to fight life's battles and walk by faith through death's valleys and to be able to say to God, "abba Father."

Prayer: We believe in you, Holy Spirit. We affirm your presence and your power. We worship and adore you. We love you and we seek you. We want to know you better and to experience all that you have for us. Be glorified in our worship and in our lives. We surrender our lives to the flames of your refining, purging, purifying fire. Come Holy Spirit. Prepare our hearts and lives to receive your fullness, that we might know you and love you and obey you and be your bold witnesses for the sake of Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.