

Holy, Holy, Holy: "Signed, Sealed, and Delivered" - 5/31/26
Jeremiah 31:31-33, Ephesians 1:11-14, Galatians 5:22-25
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Worship Question: What is something about God that you find difficult to explain?

Today is Trinity Sunday as well as Peace with Justice Sunday. And today we are going to finish up our sermon series on the Trinity. (Which I think is very fitting to do so on Trinity Sunday.) This is the 5th week where we have spent 4 sermons talking about the 3 aspects of the Trinity. Because 2 be honest, 1 week would not be enough to cover it all. Which is why we spread it out so much, and we threw in a musical to tell you the truth about Jesus as well. And let me tell you, those kids did an amazing job.

While we may be talking about the Trinity, today I wanted to continue on a little more with the Holy Spirit. We talk a lot about God, the one who created us and brought us into being. We talk a lot about Jesus, the one who died to save us from our sins. And we do talk about the Holy Spirit. But I think the Holy Spirit is a little more abstract than the other two aspects of the Godhead, probably a little more complicated, and more nuanced.

There are entire books dedicated to single aspects of the Holy Spirit, and so I wanted to take another week to look at more of this part of the Trinity - something which is talked about through the entirety of scripture. Starting all the way back in Genesis 1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen 1:1-2).

Two weeks ago we talked about how Jesus needed to leave in order to make way for the Holy Spirit. And he introduced the Spirit to us as an advocate, a comforter, an intercessor, a helper, a guide. The Spirit is a part of God that resides within us to help us and reveal God to us, keeping us on the path God has set before us.

I chose three scriptures for today for a very important reason. Jeremiah 31:31-33, Ephesians 1:11-14, Galatians 5:22-25. Each corresponds with the sermon title, "Signed, Sealed, and Delivered."

In Biblical days contracts were important. But let's not fool ourselves, contracts are important today as well. Almost every aspects of our society functions on the concept of the contract. They can be verbal or written, simple or complex, direct or implied. And half the time we don't even think about it. You go to the grocery store to buy a loaf of bread and you go through a simple, implied, verbal contract. You take the bread to the cashier, give them

the money, and walk out with the bread. You may not fill out a formal agreement with expectations, but there are expectations none-the-less - ones you agree to when you purchase the item. If you use a credit card, there is definitely a contract you sign with that. You sign with the credit card company to actually receive the services they provide and then you sign again when you use it to acknowledge that you will be paying for whatever it is you purchased.

In Biblical days, they had contracts - they had covenants and promises that were made. And they were incredibly important. And when you signed those contracts they were final.

The scripture from Jeremiah, talks about God creating a new covenant - a new contract with the people of God. The old one was broken. The Israelites could not live up to God's perfect expectations. Frankly, none of us can. And this new covenant would be one of redemption found in the forgiving blood of Jesus Christ. It would not be only an external covenant - one that the people needed to agree with and choose to follow- there would be an inner change as well. It would be something that would change the way we are, how we think, and how we act. And that would be through the work of the Holy Spirit. With the signing of the covenant - with the signing of that contract - the scripture says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (31:33b).

The Spirit signifies who we belong to. The Spirit is the proof that God signs for us. When something is delivered to your door and you sign that you received it, it is yours. The contract is completed.

When Jesus was baptized the spirit descended like a dove upon him and God confirmed who Jesus is, saying in a voice from the heavens, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The same thing happens at our baptism. It is a public declaration of our faith. We publicly sign our end of the contract, and God the other end. We are signed for by the Spirit. And God's Law, the Spirit of God, is written upon our hearts. It is an inner transformation that helps us to see what God wants for us.

It is great to sign for something, but how do you know if something is someone's after it was purchased? If you have a kid, what is that you are supposed to do to everything they own when you send it to school with them? You write their name on it, or at least part of their name. You put some sort of signifying mark on their property so people know who it belongs to. You put their name on their lunch box, their backpack, their water bottle. When they are really little you even need to put their name on the tags of their clothes. We do this so that if an item that belongs to the child is misplaced or set aside, those who will find it will know who to return it to.

That is another job of the Holy Spirit, like I stated above about baptism, it tells us and others we belong to God. Ephesians 1 reminds us that yes, we have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. We have obtained an

inheritance as children of God. And when we believe in Christ as our Lord and Savior, it tells us, we “were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13b-14).

A seal was unique to an individual or a family. It was often carved from precious stones, metal, or wood, and worn as a ring or as a pendant on a necklace. The image of the seal was pressed into softened wax or clay which would then harden, keeping the imprint of the image in the wax. This usually served as a signature to indicate ownership, authenticity, and authority. It was sometimes placed on a cord wrapped around a scroll or a parcel to show that nothing was tampered with. When Jesus’ body was laid in the tomb, Pilate had the tomb sealed, which probably meant that large ropes were fastened over the stone with globs of wax or clay over top of where they crossed and the Roman seal placed on it.

What Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 is that when we choose to follow Christ, God’s seal is placed on us through the Holy Spirit. We are marked as belonging to God. And nothing can change that. God has ultimate authority over us and nothing can tamper with that.

There is a quote by F.B. Meyer, “For sealing there are needed the softened wax; the imprint of the beloved face; the steady pressure. Would that the Spirit might impress the face of our dear Lord on our softened hearts, that they may keep it for evermore!”

Hardened wax cannot effectively receive the imprint of the image. It must be first softened, oftentimes through heating. We do not receive God unless our hearts are softened to it. And there is something that causes that to happen. Maybe it is the word or testimony of someone else. Maybe it is how we experienced the love of God in a difficult situation. Maybe it is a unique revelation of God that we received. Sometimes we are looking for it, actively seeking God. Sometimes we are adamantly turning away from God, and yet still our hearts are softened. Sometimes it catches us by surprise. However it happens, something occurs in our lives to soften our hearts which allows us to believe in Christ for our salvation and receive the imprint of the Holy Spirit - marking us as God’s children.

John Wesley described this event in his own life as a moment when he felt his “heart strangely warmed.” We call this event in John Wesley’s life his Aldersgate Experience because it happened at a Moravian Bible study on Aldersgate Street in London. This is what he wrote in his journal about May 24, 1738:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works

in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

I find it very interesting that this event in John Wesley's life happened when he was 35 years old. He grew up in the church, was ordained as a deacon in the Church of England at age 22 and as a priest at age 25. He went as a missionary to the Americas two years before this experience. And yet after all of this, he had this remarkable experience that launched his ministry into an amazing trajectory that directly led to the Methodist movement. In fact, this experience is often seen as the start of Methodism. It may not have been the point at which he chose to follow Christ, but at the very least it was a point in which he renewed his faith in God in such a way that his entire life was changed. He had a passion and fervor for serving God that he did not have before. The next day he wrote, "The moment I awaked, 'Jesus, Master', was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him, and my soul waiting on Him continually."

His passion for reaching out to those who needed Christ became paramount in his life. He reported in his journal entries that the focus of his preaching changed. He focused almost exclusively on the notion that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. And that all inward and outward holiness comes from God working in our lives through the Spirit and through God's pardoning love. To the point where pastors started banning him from preaching in their churches. In a letter to John Smith in 1748 he wrote:

It is true that, from May 24, 1738, 'wherever I was desired to preach, salvation by faith was my only theme', that is, such a love of God and man as produces all inward and outward holiness, and springs from a conviction, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, of the pardoning love of God; and that, when I was told, 'You must preach no more in this church', it was commonly added, 'because you preach such doctrine!' And it is equally true that 'it was for preaching the love of God and man that several of the clergy forbade me their pulpits', before that time, before May 24, before I either preached or knew salvation by faith.

Have you had an experience like that? Have you had your heart warmed, that you felt yourself receive the seal of God's Spirit? Have you felt energized in God's love? Have you felt truly forgiven through the blood of Christ? Have you felt empowered by the Spirit to serve God in some way? If not, don't worry. There's hope. If a seasoned pastor and missionary can receive that later on in his life, anyone can.

But it all stems from an understanding of what Christ did for us on the cross. We are delivered from our sins. We are rescued from our sins. Sin is a heavy burden that we carry around with us. It is the guilt and shame of all that we have done wrong, both purposefully and accidentally. And yet, through the forgiveness of the cross, we can set that burden down. Because God tells us we are forgiven. There is no better news than that. The wrongs we have committed have been forgiven. The pain we have caused has been forgiven. The separation that sin inserts between us and God has been mended. We have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and what God did on the cross. That is amazing grace - something we do not deserve, but God did for us out of love for us.

And because of what God did for us and because those who call themselves Christians choose to follow Christ, and because we have been signed for and sealed, something changes in us. We become a new creation. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."

Have you ever planted a garden? And did you ever forget what you planted, or maybe where you planted it? How do you figure out what you planted then? Up in Shamokin I had a little raised box bed behind the house where I planted some vegetables. I put trellises around the tomato plants right away, so that was pretty obvious. But with some of the other plants it was a little difficult to distinguish what was planted where until they started to produce fruit. Then I was able to tell exactly what kind of plant it was. I could see the different types of tomato plants I planted, and the different types of pepper plants, and so forth.

A tomato plant cannot produce mangos - sorry - I mean green peppers. (I don't know - that's just what they're called up there!) A tomato plant must produce tomatoes if it produces anything at all. And so Galatians 5 tells us what is produced by the Spirit that resides in us. As a new creation in Christ, the Spirit prompts us to produce, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (5:22a-23). That is what the Spirit delivers through us into this world.

These are all good things. These are all good attributes. To the point where Paul says, there is no law against these. It is not a crime to be gentle. It is not a crime to be kind. It is not a crime to be joyful. These are all characteristics of how Jesus wants us to act. These are all ways in which people will see the evidence of God in our lives. As Jesus told his followers in John 13:34-35, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We could spend weeks talking about each one of these fruit. We could spend several more weeks about how the Holy Spirit equips us with our giftings and our talents, which Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11-13. And is also discussed in 1 Peter 4, where in verse 10 it says, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."

But the point is this: the Spirit of God delivers to us gifts and talents to be used primarily for the glory of God and the furthering of God's kingdom. The Spirit produces the fruits we just mentioned a moment ago in our lives, giving evidence of God's presence within us. It is not something we are to hide, but something we are to use and to share, so that others may come to experience God for themselves and receive the forgiveness of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is a seal upon us, showing that we belong to the family of God through Jesus Christ, that Christ paid off the debt our sins had accrued - a debt we could not pay on our own. And in doing so, we have been forgiven. All this is a gift of God because God is good all the time. And all the time God is good.

God loves us. God cares for us - every single person. Even those who actively turn their back on God's love. God still loves them and came to this world as Jesus Christ to die on the cross for their sins and ours. And when Jesus rose again and ascended into heaven, showing his power over sin and death, he went to prepare an eternal home for us and made way for his Spirit to remain within us to guide us, instruct us, and equip us.

It is primarily through this Spirit that we experience God in our lives, that we are able to grow as disciples of Christ, and it is in the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to go out into this world to serve others. All of this - the God who created us, Jesus the Son who died for us, and the Spirit that lives within us - is the one Triune God. We may not understand how it is possible that we are able to "worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence" (Athanasian Creed). And that God was not created but always was, always is, and always will be. But regardless, we can be sure that God loves us, that Jesus died on the cross for us and rose again, and that the Holy Spirit - the Advocate, the Helper, the Comforter - lives within us to guide us through this life. This is part of the Christian faith.

And so I encourage you to open up your heart to the prodding of the Spirit. Listen as God calls to you. Listen as God reminds you that you are a child of God, that you are loved, and that the gift of love we receive is a gift we are to share with this world.