

## Online Worship 4/19/20 Second Sunday of Easter

Piano

### Greeting

Easter is not just a Sunday; it's a season that lasts fifty days. This great fifty days goes until Pentecost, when we celebrate and experience afresh the gift of the Holy Spirit who launches the church into mission in the world. This season is a good time to think about who the Holy Spirit is and what the Spirit does. We'll start a series today called "Encounter the Spirit." It's based on study with that title.

We've received no official word on when we can start meeting together again. Hang in there. We'll see each other again some day.

Hymn

*Hymn of Promise*

#707

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

If you have a prayer request you'd like to share, you can email me: [pastor@durantumc.org](mailto:pastor@durantumc.org) or go on the church website ([www.durantumc.org](http://www.durantumc.org)) and click on the Prayer tab.

One request that was shared with me last week came from Janet Moyer who asks us to pray for her friend Lynnell Berlanga, who had bypass surgery on Thursday.

Of course, we continue to pray for everyone affected by COVID-19. We pray for each other. You can bring to God whatever troubles you. He invites us to "cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us" (1 Peter 5:7).

### *Jesus, Remember Me*

Hear our cry, O God, attend unto our prayer. From the ends of the earth we cry out to you. When our hearts are overwhelmed, lead us to the rock that is higher than we are. You are our rock, our foundation, our strength, our fortress. We take refuge in you, Lord. Apart from you, we have no security. We trust in you. Help each of us to know you are with us, present and active in our lives. Enable us to see what it means to trust you and rely on you. Let us know the blessings of dwelling in you and depending on you. Give us grace and courage and compassion to share your love and faithfulness with someone else. Thank you for hearing our prayers for all who suffer, especially those who struggle with COVID-19. Thank you for all healthcare workers. We ask you to bless and strengthen them. Guide and help researchers and leaders who make decisions for safety and health. Bless all who work to help provide what we need. Help all those who can't work and who struggle financially. We ask you to bless Janet's friend Lynnell. May she know your presence and your healing grace. Bless us as a church. Though we're scattered and apart, we're still united in you. Let us feel the connection of your Spirit. May we shine with your light and share your love right where we are. We pray in Jesus' name and we join in the prayer he teaches us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into**

**temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Every week I remind you that giving remains vital. I invite you to ask God to guide your financial giving. You can give online: go to [www.durantumc.org](http://www.durantumc.org) and click on Online Giving. In recent weeks, we've had several new online givers. You can give by text: Text FUMCDURANT to 73256. Of course, you can mail a check: First UMC, PO Box 518 Durant OK 74702. Thank you.

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)*

*The Promised Holy Spirit*

**Ephesians 1:13-14**

John Breon

My friend Matt Judkins is the pastor at McAlester First UMC. He recently wrote an article titled *The Holy Spirit Is not Your Weird Uncle*. He talks about how every family seems to have that one member. The strange uncle, aunt or cousin that you don't really talk about much. You kind of hope people won't know you're related to that person. If you don't know who it is in your family, maybe it's you! When our son Eric was young, he joked about wanting to grow up and be the eccentric uncle (at least, I think he was joking!).

Matt says we tend to see the Holy Spirit as the strange relative.

We are fine with God the Father. We are great with Jesus. But we aren't quite sure what to do with the Holy Spirit. As a result, we think the Holy Spirit is just for "those Christians." You know, the Christians who are a little different or unique or even maybe extreme or weird.

[\(\(https://mattjudkins.com/2020/04/16/the-holy-spirit-is-not-your-weird-uncle/\)\)](https://mattjudkins.com/2020/04/16/the-holy-spirit-is-not-your-weird-uncle/)

Some churches have an unbalanced and unbiblical view of the Holy Spirit. If you've been exposed to that, you may be kind of gun-shy. I want you to know that you can experience God's Holy Spirit without all the baggage that some folks carry. Some churches seem to have no view of the Holy Spirit. If that's where you're coming from, you can learn about the Spirit and experience the Holy Spirit's action in refreshing and powerful ways.

We're starting a series today called "Encounter the Spirit." It's based on a study written by Carolyn Moore, a pastor in Georgia. My aim is to offer a biblical and balanced look at who the Holy Spirit is and what the Spirit does. Beyond that, I want us to experience all that God has for us. And that includes being filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit, walking in the Spirit, knowing Jesus better through the Spirit, growing in life with God as the Spirit helps us.

Today we're exploring the idea of "the promised Holy Spirit." That phrase comes in the middle of these two verses we're reading. And those verses come at the end of a longer section that started in verse three. In the Greek text, verses 3-14 are one long sentence of 202 words. The passage is almost like a hymn of praise to God. Paul follows the Old Testament and later Jewish style of an extended word of praise or blessing. He says, "Blessed be God...who has blessed us...with every spiritual blessing in Christ." The first "blessed" means praise—praise be to God. When it says that God has "blessed" us, it means that God has provided for us. What God has provided is "every spiritual *blessing* in Christ." And since they are spiritual blessings, the Holy Spirit is the one who brings them to us.

In this longer passage, we see the one God accomplishing his purposes. We also see each person of the Trinity involved in each stage of working out the divine plan. God the Father initiates and carries out his will in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Three times in this section we find the phrase "the praise of." "To the praise of his glorious grace" (6), "for the praise of his glory" (12), "to the praise of his glory" (14). Each of those

comes at the end of a section that emphasizes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We're chosen by God, redeemed in Christ, and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

What does Paul mean when he says that the Holy Spirit was promised? God promised to give the Spirit to his people. The coming of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit fulfills God's promises.

God always wants to be with his people. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God heard their cry for help and came to them. As God delivered them, he was present with them in the form of a pillar of cloud and fire that guided and protected them. Later, the Lord gave instructions for building a tabernacle, a big tent, where God's presence would be in the midst of the people. Still later, the temple in Jerusalem was the site of God presence.

And yet, God wanted to be with his people in a closer way. God promised to give his Spirit, his own presence to be with and within his people. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord said:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (36:26-27)

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord. (37:14)

And through the prophet Joel, God promised:

And afterward,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.  
I will show wonders in the heavens  
and on the earth,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke. (2:28-30)

Those are some of the key promises God made about the Holy Spirit. And Jesus told his followers, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). After Jesus' resurrection, he told his followers to wait in Jerusalem.

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)

And here's one more promise of Jesus:

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4-5)

So the Spirit was promised to God's people by the Father and by Jesus. One point Paul makes is that the Holy Spirit who was promised to the Jews is also given to Gentiles. So Jew and Gentile together share in God's inheritance in Jesus.

God the Father initiates the plan. The Father is at work in every stage. The Father carries out the plan in God the Son. Our faith is rooted in God's action in Jesus in history. It's in Christ that we find our part in God's plan and that the plan reaches its fulfillment. It's in God the Spirit that the Father continues to carry out the plan and include us.

Every spiritual blessing in Christ comes by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes real in us everything that Jesus did for us. Jesus comes into us and lives in us through the Spirit. We become Christians by receiving the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells the Gentiles he's writing to that they were included in Christ when they heard the word of truth and believed. "Word or message of truth" is another way of talking about the gospel, the good news of salvation. We sometimes think about the gospel as very basic, a message for unbelievers or new believers. And it's good to remember when and how we first heard the good news that God loves us and that Jesus died for us and will come into our lives when we trust him. But we need the gospel all the time, all through life. The newest believer and the most mature disciple need the good news. Don't let go of it. Go over it again and again.

We come to be in Christ, in relationship with him, identified with him, when we hear the good news and believe. We believe that the news about Jesus is true. We believe that he's who he says he is. We believe that we can trust him and so we do. We put our confidence in Jesus and pledge our loyalty to him. And that changes us. It's the beginning of a transformation that will carry us into eternity.

I love stories of conversion, of people coming to faith in Christ. Here's one I read recently. Mary Poplin is a professor of education at Claremont Graduate University. She attended a Methodist church as a child, but began searching other spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation, even telepathic attempts to bend spoons.

She says she knew a graduate student who lived his life differently. First of all, he prayed for her for eight years. And he would say irritating things like, "If you ever want to do anything with your spiritual life, I'd like to help you." Mary says, "That was irritating because I thought I was doing plenty with my spiritual life. You know, I was bending spoons."

And the other, more distressing thing is, he would ask questions like, "Do you believe in evil?" And she realized that she couldn't answer the question consistently.

He worked at the university as a professor for a year on a sabbatical, and after he left, Mary had a dream. She still felt empty and confused, and in the dream she was in a long line of people suspended in the air. The line seemed eternal on both ends. Jesus was standing greeting the people in line.

When she looked at Jesus, she knew immediately what she was seeing. She could only look at him for about a second. She fell down at his feet and started weeping. Her feeling in the dream was that she could sense every cell in her body, and felt total shame in every cell. Then Jesus grabbed her shoulders, and she felt total peace, like she'd never felt in her life. She woke up crying.

Here's how she describes what happened next. So I go to the phone, and I call this gentleman. He had never told me he was a Christian. But I called him and said, "I think I need to talk to you about my spiritual life." And he said, "Let's meet for dinner." At dinner, he said to me, "Why do you think you have to do something with your spiritual life now?" And out of my mouth came something I'd never thought about. I said to him, "I have some black thing in my chest. And I don't know what it is." He just nodded, and I told him the dream. I said, "What do I do?"

And he said, "Do you have a Bible?" He made sure I had one before we left that night. He said to me, "You could read five Psalms a day and one chapter of Proverbs." And I thought, well, okay, I'm going to do it. I mean, I'm really going to do it this time. And then he said, "Since Jesus was the one in your dream, you might even read the New Testament." And that's how casual he was about that.

She started to read, and they began to meet in a town between their cities about once a week. That was November to January.

In January her mother wanted to go to North Carolina to where she had grown up. They went to a little Methodist church, not because her mom was religious; she just wanted to see her friends.

Again, let's hear the story in Mary's own words. When we got there, I was really moved to just go up to the altar and give my life to the Lord. It wasn't even an altar call. It was a communion call. The guy said, you don't have to be a member of any church to take communion. You just have to believe that Jesus Christ lived, that he died for your sins, and you have to want him in your life. And when he said that, I was so powerfully moved that I actually thought, even if a tornado rips through this building, I'm going to get that communion.



I took the communion, and I didn't even listen to the guy. I knelt down and said, "Please come and get me. Please come and get me. Please come and get me." And when I took the communion and I said that, I felt free. I felt like tons of things had been lifted off of me. And I began to have an insatiable desire to read the Bible.

("The Dick Staub Interview: Mary Poplin Calls Claremont Her 'Calcutta,'" ChristianityToday.com [posted 12-10-03]

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2004/january/14775.html>)

Every one of us has a story of how we heard the word of truth and believed. If you don't have a story of doing that, today could be your day.

Paul tells these Gentiles, you all were included in Christ when you heard the word and believed. And you were sealed in Christ with the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who was promised to the Jews also marks Gentiles as belonging to the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is the seal, marking us as belonging to Jesus. To receive the Holy Spirit as God's presence in our lives marks us as God's people. We can understand being sealed in different ways. In the ancient world, documents were closed with wax that was imprinted with the seal of the person sending the document. This meant that what was inside was attested and authorized by the one sending it. Maybe the closest thing we have to that today is when we notarize a document to show that we really signed it and gave our consent to it. The Holy Spirit in us shows that God claims us and authorizes us to represent him.

Another way to see the sealing is that in the ancient world, animals (and slaves) were marked by their owners. They were branded. This was a sign of ownership and protection. The Holy Spirit in our lives marks us as being God's people, belonging to God and protected by God. If you want to know who you really are and who you're meant to be, God's Spirit living in you will show you.

There's another way to think about being sealed. Do you ever do any canning? You know, canning vegetables or fruit. I remember my grandparents had shelves of canned food in their basement. I saw a story about canning that helps us understand what Paul is saying.

A man named Michael says that his grandmother was the queen of canning. She was known throughout the community for her incredible preserves. He remembers sitting on a stool in the kitchen and ... watching her every move as she made her famous goods.

He would ask, "[Grandma] why are you always melting that wax over the fruit?" He didn't understand how wax could make any positive contribution to the flavor.

She answered, "The wax seals the jar tightly so the fruit can't be contaminated. If I didn't seal it, the fruit would eventually rot."

As an amateur in the canning business, Michael could see the importance of the picking, purchasing, and canning stages. But he saw little importance in the sealing of the preserves.

Then as an adult he realized that we are God's preserves. God chose us, redeemed us, and called us into union with his Son. God also has a plan to preserve us as heirs of eternal life. (Michael Horton, *Putting the Amazing Back into Grace* [Baker Books, 2011] 179

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/october/5101711.html>)

Paul also says that the Holy Spirit is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. The Spirit is the down payment. The word here is used only by Paul in the New Testament and he always uses it to refer to the Holy Spirit. The down payment or pledge was the first installment of a payment that guaranteed the rest would be paid. We still make down payments on cars or houses. That shows we're serious about buying and we promise to pay the full price.

God gives the promised Holy Spirit as the down payment of his full glory. All of our experience of the Holy Spirit now—all the spiritual blessings in Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, gifts of the Spirit, new life, healing, guidance, and so much more—it's all just the down payment, the first installment of what God has in store for us. It's just the "foretaste of glory divine." If what God gives us now is more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20), what must our inheritance in God's glory be? Our inheritance is the resurrection and life in the new heaven and new earth that God promises.

We are God's possession now. Someday our redemption will be complete. Until then, we live to the praise of God's glory. And in the end we will fully and completely praise the glory of God.

Already we belong to the Lord. Already we know the forgiveness of sins and new birth in Christ. Already, right now, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, showing that we belong to Christ. Already we are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But we haven't yet seen all that God has in store for us. We look forward to the end when God will make all things new. The Holy Spirit brings to us what God has for us now and prepares us for the glorious future God has for us. One writer puts it this way: "Along with the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit is the certain evidence that the future has been set in motion; and the Spirit's indwelling presence serves as God's own guarantee that we are to inherit all that has been promised" (Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* 671).

Here's how another writer sums up this section:

God has taken the initiative; God has done what is necessary, at great cost to himself, to buy us back from the slavery of sin; God has given us the [S]pirit as a sign and foretaste of the whole renewed cosmos which awaits us as our inheritance. Discovering that you are to receive an inheritance like that should change your whole life. How can you not join in the hymn of praise? (Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*)

Hymn	<i>Spirit Song</i>	#347
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