

What Jesus Says About the Holy Spirit

John 14-16

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We're talking about the Holy Spirit today. Some of you may be thinking, "All right!" Others may be thinking, "Oh, no!" And still others may be thinking, "Huh?"

Could it be that our neutral or negative feelings about the Holy Spirit persist because we have not listened carefully to what Jesus has to say? Is it possible that, here and there, we have picked up thoughts and images and concepts and emotions about the Spirit without ever having brought them to Jesus? (Reuben Welch, *We Really Do Need to Listen* 88)

Some of us may have had experiences that make us think we know all we need to know about the Holy Spirit. We still need to listen to what Jesus teaches about the Spirit.

Some of us have been turned off by certain experiences or by people who claim to be Spirit-filled. That can make us nervous about the Holy Spirit. But we can trust Jesus and need to hear what he has to say.

The passages we're looking at today are part of Jesus' "farewell discourse"—his closing message to his disciples. The Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of Jesus with his people. As we'll see, the Spirit is present with us and does various works. Let's listen to what Jesus has to say and let's open our minds and hearts to understand the Spirit more clearly and to receive God's Spirit and experience the Spirit in authentic ways that Jesus has for us.

Recently, I was at an event where I talked about some of my experience, including learning about and praying to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." Someone from another denomination asked, "Don't Methodists believe we receive the Holy Spirit when we're saved?" Yes, we do. We receive Jesus into our hearts, our lives, and it's through the Holy Spirit that he comes into us. But we also believe there's ongoing work of the Spirit in

our lives. We can receive more and we can be more fully surrendered to the Lord.

In these passages Jesus uses a unique word for the Holy Spirit. It's the word *parakletos* or *Paraclete*. It gets translated various ways: Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Companion. In Greek this word can have several meanings: "one called alongside to help," like an advocate or defense attorney; an intercessor or someone who speaks on behalf of another. It's also related to another word that describes encouragement.

One idea that runs through all that Jesus says in these chapters is that the Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of Jesus, and the Spirit continues the work of Jesus. Jesus calls the Spirit "another Paraclete." Jesus himself has been a Paraclete for the disciples. The Holy Spirit is Christ in the present tense. The ways Jesus describes the Spirit are used earlier in the Gospel to describe Jesus. The Holy Spirit is like Jesus. Just as Jesus reveals God the Father, he reveals God the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of Jesus who is "God with us." So, through the Holy Spirit, God is still with us.

Another interesting idea here is that the Holy Spirit does all these things that Jesus talks about for and through people—the followers of Jesus.

There's a man named Homer Sewell, but total strangers tend to call him "Abe." Homer Sewell bears a spooky resemblance to Abraham Lincoln. This all started years ago in Orlando, Florida, when Sewell grew a beard and schoolchildren started calling him "Abe." He completed the look by adding a black suit and stovepipe hat. And he developed a show called Abe Lincoln's America. Sewell has made over 2,400 appearances as the sixteenth president and performed for more than two million people. He explains, "As soon as I get my suit on and my hat, I become Abraham Lincoln."

Sewell's a dead ringer for Honest Abe, even without makeup. And we have to admire his attention to detail. The car he drives is a ... Lincoln, of course.

Sewell is part of a group called the "Association of Lincoln Presenters" (<http://www.lincolnpresenters.com/>). That's a group of men and women dedicated to bringing Abraham and Mary Lincoln to life. There are 150

Abes and 30+ Marys across the country. Together they form a group of passionate Lincoln-lovers committed to presenting the president and his wife to the world in costume and words. It must be a strange sight to go to a convention of the Association of Lincoln Presenters and see dozens of Abes and Marys walking around. The group naturally includes Sewell, who was given the “Lincoln of the Year” award in 1999 (*Homiletics Online*, May 2004).

As Christians, we’re part of the “Association of Jesus Presenters.” We’re becoming like Jesus—not by dressing up a certain way or wearing theatrical makeup. God, through the Holy Spirit in us, is shaping our lives to be like the life of Jesus—in faith, in character, in behavior. The Holy Spirit is invisible, so if the world is going to see the Spirit at work and hear what the Spirit is saying, it’s going to happen through people the Holy Spirit lives in. If we’re going to present Jesus to each other and to the world, it’ll be as the Holy Spirit empowers us and expresses the life of Christ through us.

With all that in mind, let’s look at each of the passages in the farewell discourse where Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit. There are five:

- 14:15-18 The Spirit is Our Helper or Advocate
- 14:25-27 The Spirit is Our Teacher
- 15:26-27 The Spirit Witnesses
- 16:5-11 The Spirit Convicts
- 16:12-15 The Spirit Guides

Helper/Advocate

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:15-18)

In the context of answered prayer, love, and obedience, Jesus says that the Father will give another Paraclete to be with us forever. Jesus was

about to leave the disciples. But he told them that when the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, came to them, they would know that Jesus was still with them.

They would recognize the Spirit from having seen Jesus' ministry, which the Spirit would carry on. Also, the Spirit was already with them through their contact with Jesus. But later the Spirit would live *in* them. We might wonder what the difference is between the Holy Spirit being *with* us or *within* us. It's like if you're hiking and you have your lunch with you in your backpack. But when you get hungry, you want it, not just with you, but within you. Jesus is God with us. The Holy Spirit is God within us.

Teacher/Interpreter

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:25-27)

Jesus now reminds the disciples of what he has said to them while he was physically present. After he's gone, who will teach them? Who will explain the meaning of Jesus' words? Often the disciples didn't understand what Jesus said and did.

Again, the Paraclete will continue Jesus' ministry in them. The Spirit comes in the name of Jesus because the Spirit reveals the meaning of Jesus for people. The Spirit will do this as he teaches the disciples and reminds them of all that Jesus said to them. The Spirit's teaching is not something new and different from Jesus' teaching. Anything the Holy Spirit makes known to us is rooted in Jesus' words and gives us fuller understanding of what Jesus said.

Just because someone claims the Holy Spirit's inspiration doesn't make them right. We have to use Scripture to check out what people say. The Spirit of God won't reveal something contrary to the Word of God. At the same time, the words of Jesus aren't locked in the past. The Holy Spirit

shows how what Jesus said relates to where we are now. The Spirit shows the meaning of God's word for living today.

This is why we sometimes pray:

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the Scriptures are read and your word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #6)

Witness

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27)

Jesus says that the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, will testify or witness about Jesus. The Spirit continues to proclaim Jesus, to point to him as the One sent from God who gives life. The Spirit speaks on behalf of Jesus and so continues Jesus' mission of bearing witness to the Father.

If the world can't see or know God's Spirit (14:17), how does the Spirit bear witness to the world? We're called to join in the ministry of bearing witness to Jesus. The Holy Spirit can speak to people and nudge them closer to God without our help. And the Spirit does speak and appeal to people directly. But God has also chosen to involve us in this ministry, to bear witness through us. The context here includes persecution. Jesus had told his disciples earlier that when they face persecution and trial, they shouldn't worry about how to defend themselves or what to say. In such a setting, it will be "the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:20).

I remember hearing that one thing Christians do is witness, that is, tell people about Jesus. But I didn't know how to witness. I didn't know what to say. I didn't have the motivation or strength to do it. That's part of why hearing about being filled with the Holy Spirit appealed to me. The people who told me about that experience also spoke openly about Jesus and

what he was doing in their lives. That experience freed me up to be more open as well. Eventually it led to preaching and teaching as my main forms of witness. Not everybody does it the same. Be creative in finding ways to share faith with people in your life and trust that God's Spirit will lead and empower you and that the Spirit is already at work in the people he leads you to.

We're never alone in witnessing. God is always there before us. And God is always with us, giving us words and insights when we do speak to someone for God. The Holy Spirit bears witness and invites us to join in the ministry of witness.

Bob Tuttle has been telling a story for nearly fifty years about when he would visit the county jail one afternoon a week. Someone would push a pillow through the bars so Bob could sit on the floor and talk with the men about faith in God. After weeks of sharing with them, one of the men who had resisted the most suddenly accepted Christ. Bob was thrilled. The next day he went to see his new convert, just to polish him up a bit. The man said, "Tuttle, I was awake all last night, thinking. It occurred to me that it takes an average of twenty-five different witnesses before any real encounter with God happens and just because you were number twenty-five, you think you did it all, and you stink." Bob says, "He had me. I began to weep. Just because I was number twenty-five I thought I had done it all, when twenty-four, just as important, had gone before me." And numbers twenty-six through fifty are important too. The Holy Spirit works through all of those witnesses and all of that follow-up. (see Tuttle's books, *The Partakers* 21; *Can We Talk?* 73)

The Holy Spirit Convicts

but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, "Where are you going?" Rather you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where

you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:5-11)

Here Jesus tells his disciples that they'll be hated and persecuted and that he is going away. Jesus had been the target of opposition, but with him gone they would feel the full force of the attacks. But he also tells them, "It is for your good that I go away. Because if I go, the Paraclete will come." The Holy Spirit would strengthen Jesus' followers and empower them to witness to their persecutors.

The Spirit would also be a "prosecutor" who convicts the world. John has portrayed Jesus as being on trial through this Gospel. Finally the world passes judgment on Jesus and condemns him. But when the Spirit comes, he shows that the world was wrong in that judgment.

The Holy Spirit shows that the world is guilty of sin, especially the sin of refusing to believe in Jesus. The Spirit shows that Jesus is righteous—God vindicates him by raising him from the dead and exalting him. Followers of Jesus are also vindicated and put right because we're connected to him by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit shows that the prince of this world (that is, the devil) is condemned and the world that identifies with the devil is also condemned.

There's still opportunity to repent of the sin of unbelief, of rejecting Jesus. But without repentance, there is no defense. Whoever rejects the Holy Spirit's witness is condemned by that witness.

The main point of this passage is that the Holy Spirit witnesses to the truthfulness and victory of Jesus. In Christ we share that victory and bear witness to it.

Guide

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that

belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (John 16:12-15)

Jesus says that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. Jesus spoke the Father's words—so does the Spirit. Jesus revealed and glorified the Father. The Spirit reveals and glorifies Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit we have available to us all that belongs to Jesus.

Jesus has introduced us to the way of truth and the Holy Spirit guides us farther along that way. This is more than giving us facts. It's bringing our lives more in line with Jesus' teaching.

I heard this week about the man who invented the pendulum clock. Anybody have a grandfather clock or a mantle clock with a pendulum? In the 1500s, this man was experimenting with pendulums. He had several setting on shelves. He noticed that though they could start swinging at different times and different speeds, after a while they were in sync. They were swinging together. The Holy Spirit syncs us up with Jesus, with his life and teaching. Our hearts move in sync with his.

The Spirit of God gives us power to live by the truth. We follow the Spirit's guidance along the way of truth in Jesus.

A mountain climbing guide on a narrow ledge at night said to a nervous climber, "Hold my belt, put your feet along my ankles, put your foot right where I put my foot" (Jim Buskirk, "Recognizing the Spirit," FUMC Tulsa, audio tape). The Holy Spirit guides us in the steps of Jesus.

There's one more mention of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples. He gave them peace. He gave them a job to do. Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:19-22). The Holy Spirit is here right now: nudging us, speaking to us, calling us, witnessing to us, offering us forgiveness, bringing us the life of God. We can refuse this offer or we can open up and receive this gift that Jesus offers us and then share it with others.