As you know, we are in the middle of a sermon series on the Apostles’ Creed, which is organized around our belief in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The creed says a lot more about the Son, because Jesus Christ is the way to God. It is imperative that we understand who Jesus is and what he has done for us. So let’s review. God created us to have a relationship with Him, but all of us have turned away from God. Our sin separates us from God, and the penalty for that sin is spiritual death. So, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son in human flesh to live and die as one of us and to reconcile us to himself. In his real human body, Jesus lived a perfect life and so fulfilled all righteousness for us as we would never be able to do. In his death, he paid the penalty for our sin. By his resurrection, he overcame the power of sin and death and won the victory for us. And when he ascended to his rightful place at the Father’s side, he brought with him all those who have believed in him. Our position is in Christ. We are children of God and citizens of heaven with Christ.

Our access to new life and a loving relationship with the one Triune God has been made possible through Christ alone. To believe in Jesus is to place our confidence in who he is and all he has done for us in his life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. Faith or belief in Jesus is the way to access the grace of God in Christ alone, who has done in and through and for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Now that is a review of the creed up to this point and some of what we have been talking about for the last seven weeks. But if the creed ended with the ascension of Christ, we would have to ask, “So what?” That’s all good and right to understand and believe what Jesus did for us, but what do we do now that he is gone?

And that question isn’t only important for us; it was extremely significant for Jesus’ first followers. In January, I preached a sermon on the life of Abraham using the outline of orientation, disorientation and reorientation. I think this three-fold pattern is also helpful in naming the community’s experience of its journey of following Jesus. During Jesus’ ministry, the disciples were being oriented to an understanding of life in the kingdom of God. They had spent three
years with Jesus—learning from him, believing in him, witnessing great deeds done by him. They believed Jesus was the Messiah, and they were willing to leave everything to follow him. They were filled with expectation that he would overthrow the Roman government, establish the nation of Israel and reign as their king. So, when Jesus started talking about his departure from this earth through his death, the disciples were understandably shaken.

It is impossible to overstate the crisis and disorientation that the believing community faced as a result of Jesus’ death. They weren’t simply experiencing the loss of their teacher and friend, they were also grieving the loss of expectations, dreams for how life was going to be, loss of a hope for the future. They were left with a lot of questions. Jesus’ death and return to God marked the end of the incarnation. And if God’s revelation was lodged in Jesus, the incarnate Son, then what happens when he’s gone?

I was once at a retreat when someone approached me and confessed being upset by the fact that Jesus’ first disciples had the blessing of being with Jesus when he lived on earth, but the rest of us will never have that experience. This person felt a sense of loss and felt that it just wasn’t fair. We had a long conversation about what we are going to look at today. This person grew up saying the creed every week, so I pointed her to the fact that the creed doesn’t end with Jesus. It goes on to say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Let’s look at our scripture passage today to see how the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit changes everything. In verses 15 and 16, we read, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.” The disciples are sad at the thought of Jesus’ departure, but he wants to assure them of his ongoing presence now and forever. While Jesus lived in his earthly body, he truly was limited. He could only be in one place at one time, ministering to those who were physically present with him. But now that Jesus has ascended, the presence of God continues with the community of God in all times and all places. In John 16:7, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

The term “another advocate” should not be understood as a different but another like himself. The Greek word for advocate is parakletos or “Paraclete.” This term is unique to the Gospel of John. It occurs
Now we see that the Holy Spirit will continue Jesus’ ministry of revealing God’s truth.

in secular Greek literature for an advocate in a court of law, who comes “alongside” a person to speak in his or her defense and provide counsel.

This week, I took my younger son to his T-ball practice. There are only seven boys on the team, and while we have a wonderful dad serving as the coach, having one coach is not enough for these little guys. Each one needs an advocate standing right beside or behind him, talking to him and coaching him through each move that needs to be made with each play—even going up to them and helping them actually do what needs to be done. That’s a great picture for what I’m trying to say. Jesus’ life and ministry was amazing. As one man in one time and place, he accomplished all that was necessary for salvation. Now, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, God is present to each of us for the life we are living right here and right now in every time and place.

Let’s go on to verse 17 and following: “This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

The image of being left an orphan is very descriptive. The disciples have really depended on Jesus’ presence and power for their very lives and ministry. They had given up everything to put their confidence in him, so the thought of his leaving is like having their spiritual parent taken away before they are ready. Jesus will not leave his disciples orphaned, because his presence and power will continue because the Holy Spirit will be with them. And there is probably a double meaning here in that he is also alluding to his second coming and coming again.

Now we see that the Holy Spirit will continue Jesus’ ministry of revealing God’s truth. The presence of God was made available by the incarnation of Christ. Jesus was the revelation of God’s truth. But now that same presence is given to the community of faith and to all who believe through the Holy Spirit.

So this changes everything. Throughout the Old Testament, God dwelled within his holy temple. He was with the people in that special way. Even during the incarnation of Jesus, God is described as being with the people God. Jesus is Emanuel—God with us. But now God is not only abiding with us, he is in us through the Holy Spirit. A new relationship
The Holy Spirit is the one who transforms us to become the kind of person who is able to keep Jesus’ word and to empower us to be able to say and do the things that Jesus did.

with God has been made possible. By faith in Christ, we are washed clean through the forgiveness of our sin, so we are now prepared to receive the indwelling presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. That is what we celebrate in baptism. God is not just with us; God is in us—indwelling, transforming and empowering us in a way that was not true before.

It’s important to keep in mind that Jesus is not speaking merely to individuals but to the community of believers. It is the church collectively that is now the temple of God where the Spirit of God resides.

Let’s go on to verses 21-24: “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me, does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.”

This section helps us understand the importance of Jesus as the revelation of God. He was the living word, the revealed word of God. So keeping his revealed word is an important aspect of discipleship and a primary way that we show our love. The Holy Spirit is the one who transforms us to become the kind of person who is able to keep Jesus’ word and to empower us to be able to say and do the things that Jesus did. We see here that obedience to Jesus is the supreme act of love.

25“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” Undoubtedly the disciples were feeling like they didn’t know enough or weren’t ready to be left on their own, so Jesus’ words must have been reassuring. The Holy Spirit helps believers to remember and understand the words that Jesus has spoken and he makes the word of God applicable to our present circumstances.

I remember a time in my early twenties when I was feeling very anxious about the future. I was really afraid of getting cancer and really afraid of grieving the death of loved ones. I was anxious and unable to sleep because I was gripped by fear, afraid of what my life might bring and wondering whether I would be able to deal with it. And, in the moment of a desperate prayer to God, I
The Holy Spirit is a sign of Jesus’ presence and peace.

know the Holy Spirit seared on my heart and soul the words said to me; the words of 2 Corinthians 12: “My grace is sufficient for you.” And in that moment, my anxiety dissipated. I realized that while I was not yet ready for what might be ahead, the grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit would be with me and would help me.

John 16:12 has come to mean a lot to me over the years. Again, Jesus is speaking to his disciples and us: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.” Because God is always with us and now in us through the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t have to reveal everything all at once. He can reveal to us the truth that we need in the moments and days and years of our lives as we need it and as we are ready to receive it.

Finally, in verse 27, we read, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” The Holy Spirit is a sign of Jesus’ presence and peace. Jesus understands that his departure is a very disorienting time for the disciples, so he promises the presence of his Spirit and the peace that transcends our circumstances. At a profoundly personal level, Jesus is sum-

ming up the essence of his work and presence in the world. Peace is the gift of his kingdom. Jesus is promising that this peace would be his gift to them. This is so significant because we must remember that the disciples as well as those who first read this gospel would experience the world’s hatred and persecution. But even in the midst of uncertainty and danger, God’s gift of peace was theirs.

I remember the week following the death of my brother thirty years ago. It was one of the most difficult times of my life, as one of my worst fears had come to pass. But in the midst of the shock, sadness and profound disorientation, I was also aware of this underlying peace of God that surpasses all understanding. I knew that even in the worst experience of my life, God was with me and in me, helping me in ways I could perceive and, undoubtedly, ways I could not perceive. Peace is a fruit of God’s Spirit and a sign of his presence.

I want to turn now to John 20: 19-23. This takes place on evening of the first Easter Sunday after Jesus’ first resurrection appearance. Remember, the disciples are still very fearful and afraid because of all that they had witnessed in Jesus’ brutal suffering and death. There is a real threat to their own lives.
“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

This passage is the fulfillment of Jesus’ earlier teaching on the Holy Spirit as they receive the indwelling presence and accompanying peace and power that comes from the Holy Spirit. This is when Jesus is reorienting them to a new way of life—a life in the Spirit. What I want to focus on especially in this passage is Christ’s commission of the disciples as he says: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has been described as the one who was sent by God. He was the one who was made incarnate by the Spirit, was baptized by the Spirit, and was anointed by the Spirit for ministry. Jesus is the one person God has given the Spirit to without measure, the one through whom the Spirit flows like a living spring, a source of life and renewal. Jesus literally was God embodied on earth. He alone possessed the power and authority of God. But he is going to ascend and will no longer be physically present on earth.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He literally breathes on these first disciples, signifying that he is giving them his life—the life he made possible through his life, death and resurrection. This is a new and different kind of life—a spiritual and eternal life. This life comes to them through the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. God is not only with them; he is now in them.

Jesus breathes on his disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit and sends them and the entire church who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit to be God’s ambassadors and agents and representative in the world in all times and places. They are not sent to do their ministry; they are sent to participate in Christ’s continuing ministry on earth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We see a remarkable change in the lives of the disciples when we compare their lives and ministry in the Gospels to those in the Book of Acts. Certainly they have the great advantage of viewing everything Jesus said and did through the lens of the cross and resurrection. They have come to understand what it means for Jesus to be the
Christ has done everything possible to give you his life, and he longs to begin a relationship with you and to give you his Spirit.

Messiah, and there has been a profound letting go and grieving their misplaced expectations about who Jesus was and what he would do for them and what their lives would look like. But we really witness a dramatic change in them. They have let go and let God. They have received the Holy Spirit, and his presence, power and peace are manifested in their lives and ministry in ways that are probably unimaginable to many of us. They are living lives truly dependent on the grace of Christ and the power of Holy Spirit to do in and through and for them what only God can do. They are Christ’s living presence doing Christ’s work on earth.

The crosses on my stole are called the Jerusalem cross. There is a large cross in the middle representing Jesus and what he did for us in Jerusalem. But then there are four smaller crosses in the corners representing the four Gospels that have gone out to the four corners of the earth—north and south, east and west. The gospel was given to us in Christ, but it is to be carried to the ends of the earth through the people of God who are indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is not the work of ministers and missionaries. This is the work of all God’s people empowered by the Holy Spirit. Dick Halverson’s benediction, which Stan Ott always uses, helps us understand what is happening:

Wherever you go, God is sending you; wherever you are, God has put you there; he has a purpose in your being there. Christ who indwells you has something he wants to do through you where you are.

Believe this and go in his grace and love and power.

So, in closing, I want you to think about your life. Some of you may not have the Holy Spirit because you have not put your trust in Jesus. Christ has done everything possible to give you his life, and he longs to begin a relationship with you and to give you his Spirit. Don’t delay. Talk to someone today about what that means for you.

Some of you may have trusted in Jesus, but you really haven’t arranged your life to follow him or to learn from him or to understand what it means to have his spirit in you and working through you. Take a step to become more engaged in the life of discipleship by connecting to practices, relationships and experiences that will help you grow in your relationship with God. Become part of a small group, a Bible study, or find a spiritual friend.

Know that when you and I walk out those doors today, we are being sent by God to love the families we are a part of, to do our work—whatever it is—with integrity and excellence, to see the people around us as God sees them, and to give
When we leave today, each of us is sent to love, care and reach out to those around us. Begin to pray for these people regularly, and ask God to empower you to be the presence of Christ to them. Take a step to be involved in ministry as an ambassador for God.

Some here are in a difficult season of life, grieving the loss of a loved one or dealing with ill health, or financial stress, or any number of crises. Be assured that God’s presence and peace are yours. And if just getting through the day is all you can do, take that as a sign of God’s Spirit helping you.

I don’t know where you are or what your needs are, but I believe in the Holy Spirit, and I trust that he is able to give you the nudge, encouragement or challenge that you need today to take the next step in your journey of faith. Let’s pray.