

Sunday 18th August
Creed Sermon 10 - The Holy Spirit

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Romans 8:9-17

John 14:15-26

Today in our sermon series on the Nicene Creed we come to the phrase about our belief in the Holy Spirit. So I wonder what you would say if I asked you to tell me about the Holy Spirit. Wait, you might say, that's your job, not mine. Be that as it may.

But the point is that lots of people, lots of Christians, lots of churchgoers, perhaps some of you - aren't really sure what to make of the Holy Spirit. When we think of the Christian understanding of God as Trinity – 3 persons but one God, we can understand and picture God the Father and God the Son, but God the Holy Spirit is not quite as easy to grasp.

God the Father – we probably have an idea of the creator; the one behind the universe; the one who planned creation and even dreamt up human beings. The one who caused all this to be – and not just to be but to grow and develop and thrive. The one who gave people like you and me the freedom to choose right or wrong; the freedom to mess things up. Perhaps we might also picture the Father as one who weeps over the way his creation has gone. Who longs for people to turn back to him. Which might in turn help us in our understanding of God the Son

We can picture Jesus as a human being. We might have him in our minds as a fair haired white Anglo Saxon, which he most definitely wasn't as he was born in the Middle East, but he is most definitely a human being. We know the stories about him; the teaching he gave, the tales he told, the things he did. We can read about his attitude to others, perhaps particularly those who are often taken advantage of or ignored. We can see that this human being Jesus was what God the Father, the creator had in mind when he created human beings – and perhaps we can begin to understand what his death on the cross was all about, and how it has helped us be reunited with God. And knowing these things about Jesus – God in human form – can help us as we live our daily lives. Last week in Kids church we were thinking about wisdom for life, and how asking ourselves the question *What Would Jesus Do* is not a bad way to help us to make decisions. And to remind us to do just that we made WWJD wrist bands.

But God the Holy Spirit. Maybe many of us would begin to falter there. How do we picture this person of the Trinity, this aspect of God? What do we understand by the Holy Spirit. How important is the Holy Spirit in our lives?

In our creed week by week we proclaim that:

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

But what does that mean, how does that belief help us in our daily lives

In the Gospel reading we have just heard, Jesus talks of the Advocate, the helper if you like – the Spirit of Truth – in other words the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. He says he will ask the Father to send the Spirit to help and to teach the disciples. This Holy Spirit is the very life of God – the word for spirit is the same as the word for breath – the breath of God, the life of God.

That was Jesus' promise and as we glance ahead in our Bible we can see how this pans out. At the start of the Acts of the Apostles we read that on the Day of Pentecost the disciples are together in a locked room, scared, afraid and unsure of who they were and what they should be doing. Suddenly there was the sound of rushing wind (that word again – the word for wind is the same as breath or spirit) and tongues of fire appeared on their heads. They began to speak in strange languages. They were filled with a boldness to preach the gospel message. The next we hear is of Peter standing up in front of a huge crowd and challenging them and some 3000 responded to the message of the gospel that day. The Holy Spirit came to them, filled them we might say and completely changed them. Giving them confidence, words to say and a purpose for life.

The rest of the book of Acts tells the story of these disciples, tells the story of how the Holy Spirit worked through them as they spread the Christian message. Ordinary people transformed by the Holy Spirit, by the power and presence of God

The letters of the New Testament give an insight into what was happening to these groups of Christians that were springing up all over the Mediterranean area, and contain teaching about this new faith and how it affects lives.

Paul wrote many of the letters and our second reading today was from one of them, the letter to the Church in Rome, where he talks of the presence of the Holy Spirit being a mark of being a Christian. "Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does

not belong to him". The Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to those first disciples, the Holy Spirit that came with such great power and effect at Pentecost is for us too. For me. For you. For everyone who wants to follow Jesus.

But Paul goes on. This Holy Spirit is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. God's Spirit that is present in every Christian – in you and in me – is powerful and life giving. The power that raised Jesus from death to life. And just as the Holy Spirit brought resurrection – new life – to Jesus, so he brings new life in us – just as for those first disciples. Pretty mind blowing stuff.

Paul goes on to say that the Spirit within us is evidence that we are children of God – we can relate to God as a loving parent; we can have that close and intimate relationship with God. New life, new purpose, new relationship.

Elsewhere Paul talks of the Spirit changing us; and of what this new life could be like. He describes the fruit the Spirit produces in the lives of Christians – things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He outlines the role of the Holy Spirit in building up and equipping the church by giving individual people particular gifts. Some of these we might label as "spiritual" such as preaching, healing, special faith and speaking in tongues. Others are much more practical like administration, hospitality, encouragement and generosity. But, he says, these gifts are given by the Spirit to be used for God's purposes. Today we have remembered the hymn writer Timothy Dudley Smith – given a particular gift from God to build up and encourage the church. I am sure we can all think of many others given particular gifts by the Spirit that they have used for God and for good.

Paul cannot envisage being a Christian without the presence of the Holy Spirit. He cannot imagine a church without the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the very life of the church and of Christians. The Spirit helps us to pray, gives us courage and helps us to live more like Jesus, more like God wants us to live.

This is all a fulfilment of the prophecies in the Old Testament, like the one we heard this morning from Joel. *A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.*

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon particular people in particular situations. King David, for example, but also ordinary folk like Bezalel who was given the gift of creativity and craftsmanship by the Spirit (you can read about Bezalel in Exodus chapter 31). But the promise in those prophecies and fulfilled in the New

Testament is that now the Holy Spirit is for all. God's presence with each of us all the time. Guiding us, encouraging us, changing us and equipping us.

So we see how the Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life – the very breath of God. We have heard the promise of Jesus that the Father will send the Spirit in the name of Jesus to all who believe; we can see how the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead, the Trinity and as such is to be worshipped; and we can reflect on the OT prophecies that have been fulfilled.

And week by week as we come toher to worship, the Spirit is present in all we are and all we do, right the way through our worship service.

In our initial greeting - In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, And of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one person of the Trinity.

In the Gloria – you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is to be worshipped and praised

In our Collect “ Jesus Christ your Son our Lord who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit”. The Holy Spirit brings unity and purpose

In the Eucharistic prayer “by the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus was born” – the Spirit is powerful in the life and resurrection of Jesus and in our lives. Also in the Eucharistic prayer we pray that God “sends down the Holy Spirit on his people that we might praise God for ever.”. The Spirit helps us pray and praise God.

In our prayer after communion “send us out in the power of the Holy Spirit” – the power of the Holy Spirit helps us as we live, as we seek to follow Jesus and live like him

And finally in the final blessing where we pray for the blessing of each person of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There are many facets to the work of the Holy Spirit. Power, help, strength, comfort, growth are just a few. Someone has described the Holy Spirit as being both a powerful friend and a friendly power. Maybe that's a good way of thinking about the Spirit. But one thing is sure from scripture – we cannot live as Christians without the Holy Spirit, without the presence and power of God within us. That presence is not an optional extra for super keen Christians, it is the very life of God for all; it is both a privilege and a priority for each one of us.

So I invite you now to join with me as we pray for that presence in each of our lives