

**“HOLY SPIRIT”**  
**A Sermon Preached at**  
**FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Belleville, IL**  
**By The Rev Alex Lysdahl**  
**April 6, 2025**  
(transcribed from audio file)

Our scripture reading this morning is from John 16:1-15.

*‘I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.*

*‘I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, 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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.*

*‘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 the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.     NRSV*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As Presbyterians we don't give the Holy Spirit a lot of mic time, do we? We don't talk about the Holy Spirit and most often struggle to describe the Holy Spirit. At the 8 o'clock I asked them to help me fill the sheet of words to describe the Holy Spirit and there was a long silence. It took us a while. Now, don't worry. That's not your homework assignment, but it took us a while and we got there. And I wonder why is it that we don't talk about the Holy Spirit so much.

Our prayers often mention Jesus, but we rarely refer to the Spirit. Sometimes we talk about the Father, but we struggle. I think we have a hard time talking about the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit isn't physically present in a human form like Jesus was all those years ago. The Holy Spirit guides our hearts and our minds and our communities, but there is nothing so tangible about the Holy Spirit that we feel super confident to talk about the Spirit.

The Spirit is that still, quiet voice that speaks to you and guides you to do the right thing; that gives you the confidence to step out in faith; comforts us when we need to be reminded of God's presence. It's not super tangible but the Holy Spirit is a big deal.

Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit is kind of a big deal in verse 7. Jesus says, *Very truly I tell you it is for your good, for your good, that I am going away. Unless I go away the advocate will not come to you.* The advocate being the Holy Spirit. *But if I go, I will send him to you.* In other words, you're gonna want the advocate. Also translated as comforter.

Jesus tells his disciples that they are going to want this advocate that is coming because this advocate is the spirit of truth and will give them guidance. You're going to want this. Kind of a big deal when Jesus says, you're going to be excited about this. You're going to want this. And I think that the good news in our passage is that we have the advocate. We have the Holy Spirit with us, because I don't know about you but I could use some guidance, some encouragement, some truth in my life right now. I could use the advocate to keep me from following what's not so Christ-like in our world.

I have a family member who really loves to talk about faith and religion with me. I was on the phone with them for a long time yesterday and often when we get on the topic of the Bible, she loves to say things like, "I don't believe they should have closed the Canon. God isn't done speaking" and she's right. God isn't done speaking.

Jesus says in verse 12, *I have much more, 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 truths. He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

Jesus knows. This is the scripture passage where he talks for a really long time in the gospel of John right before he dies. He knows this is coming so there is a bunch of teaching to his disciples, and he knows his people will need more guidance but also that they are not ready for everything that he has yet to teach them. They're not ready! They're not ready for one big file download of everything Jesus has for them and so the on-going work, the on-going work of the Holy Spirit is to continue to speak truth to us; to continue to guide the followers of Jesus; to continue to guide us.

When Christ died and rose from the grave, God was not done. God still isn't done and that is indeed good news this morning.

You know, one of the fun things about preaching is hearing what people say to you after you preach. And the nice words, the kind words are very nice, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about when people share something specific that stood out to them. Something specific about their faith or what they learned about God or something that spoke to them in their heart about faith. Those personal takeaways are fascinating. I love to hear them, so please don't stop. But sometimes it's not quite what you were hoping they would take away. Sometimes as a pastor it wasn't perhaps what you were hoping to get across in your sermon, but it's still a good thing. It's still good takeaways. It's obviously something that they needed to hear in that moment. It's obviously what God needed to say to them.

So, whenever that happens and I believe it happens every week, whether or not you all share with us or not. Whenever that happens, I am grateful that the Holy Spirit spoke to that person through the sermon. Because the Holy Spirit spoke truth to them in a way that they needed to hear it or in a way that they would be able to receive it, because God isn't done speaking. So, I trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in worship, and you hear what God wants you to hear, and you hear what you are willing and able to receive.

How do I know it was the Holy Spirit? Well because it matched the word of God. So, when you share something with me that was your takeaway, it almost always matches the word of God, and I know it's the Holy Spirit at work. But people ask that question, right? How do I know? How do I know it is God speaking to me? How do I know it's the Holy Spirit? I think on the board it says something about

checking that guidance. Check it. Do you know that's the Holy Spirit? That question gets asked. How do I know that this is God speaking to me and not like my personal desires being louder? So, how do we know? We hold it up to scripture. Does it match what Jesus said? Or does it go against Christ's teaching?

Remember that Jesus said in our passage, the Holy Spirit will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. So, we can ask ourselves, does what I feel like God is telling me match the word of God? Does it match what Jesus has taught us? Is what I think God is telling me going to lead me to love my neighbor? To care for the poor? To stand up for the oppressed and marginalized? So, does what I think God is telling me foster unity? Does it promote peace? Is it loving? And you have your answer.

There is a prayer attributed to St. Patrick called "Christ Be With Me" and I think many of you have heard this. I want to read the first part of it.

Christ with me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me,  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down,  
Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.

How is that possible? How is that possible? Through the Holy Spirit. It's through the Holy Spirit that that is possible. The advocate that Christ gave us to guide us and to speak truth, to be with us wherever we are, because God isn't done speaking.

Amen? Amen.