

The Work of the Spirit

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

26 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning

4b"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 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. 8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11 about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 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. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me,
Mold me, fill me,
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.

Today is 7th Sunday after Easter or Pentecost and Christians all over the world are celebrating the birthday of the Church. Today is about the Spirit, Pentecost, and Easter. Usually on this Sunday we are totally dependent on Luke's story in Acts 2:1-21 for the specific account of Pentecost Sunday. Among New Testament writers, only Luke tells of the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit at the Jewish festival of Pentecost. Several New Testament writers speak of the Holy

Spirit, including Paul in Romans 8:22-27 and John in our text, but none of them refers to Pentecost. The differences point to the rich diversity of New Testament descriptions of the Spirit.

In John, Jesus gives the Spirit to the disciples, not on Pentecost but on Easter, when the risen Christ breathes on them and tells them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22), empowering them for mission. This story resonates with Genesis's description of God's breathing "into [human] nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7). Jesus promises the disciples the Spirit at his Last Supper (John 14-16); and explains the purpose of the Spirit before breathing the Spirit on them on Easter day. **Paul L. Hammer**

The setting of Jesus' instructions is the Last Supper, a time of sadness for his disciples. One of the losses we humans feel most keenly is that of human companionship. When a person we have been close to leaves "for good," we experience grief and sorrow. In John's Gospel the essence of love is to be connected to and share deeply in the presence and work of Jesus. In Jesus' farewell discourse we see him dealing with the disciples' love and sorrow at his impending departure. Jesus, anticipating the grief they will inevitably feel, prepares the disciples for his return to the Father. Although it is time for him to leave them physically, he will continue to be with them spiritually through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Paraclete, Advocate, Helper, Comforter—One who by coming alongside gives strength, encouragement, and ability. Jesus emphasizes three particular aspects of the work of the promised helper.

First, the Spirit is the Truth-Telling Witness (15:26-27). The One who will replace Jesus' physical presence in the world will be the "Spirit of truth" who will speak truthfully and bear testimony on his behalf. Because the Spirit, sent by Jesus, will come from the Father, he will continue the work of both Father and Son. What he says will be precisely what Father and Son have said. He will strengthen the

community of believers and enable them and us to speak the truth about what they and we have experienced of Jesus the Son. The testimony of the Spirit within the disciples and in the community of the church will empower us to testify in word and deed to what they have witnessed in the life of Jesus from the very beginning.

Second, the Spirit takes us from Grief to Prophetic Proclamation (16:4b-11). Jesus does not fail to acknowledge the sorrow and pain of his disciples. However, Jesus argues that his leaving has its advantages. Far from being all bad, his departure will give room for a greater engagement with the whole world. Although the community of faith may initially grieve the loss of his physical presence, they will be imbued with power from on high and will become a courageous community unafraid to confront the world with the truth of the Word of God. There are three areas of confrontation between the community of faith and the world. Each is theological, having to do with the truth of the Word of God: sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Sin is not so much a moral failure as a theological one. As in the garden Adam and Eve chose not to believe the word of God, so in the world sin lies in our human failure to believe the word of God. Righteousness also is not so much a moral as a theological category. The truth of the Word of God is seen in the vindication of Jesus. Unbelieving eyes see his death as a defeat. However, the eyes of faith see his resurrection as a vindication, a victory over the world, made known by his promised triumphal return to and embrace by the Father, who sent him into the world in the first place. Judgment has to do with who has the ultimate and final say—the power of evil in the world or God. In Jesus' life, death, and especially his resurrection, the eyes of faith can see the overthrow of the power of evil. The ultimate truth is made plain, even before the end of time. The Spirit of truth will not only help the believing community see and understand these ultimate truths, but also impart the courage to bear witness to them before an unbelieving world.

The Promised Helper will inspire spiritual insight and moral courage. Throughout history, when people of faith have seen truth that others cannot see, they have often found the grace to courageously live and bear witness to it. Such courage is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Third, the Spirit is the Helper and the Teacher Who Has More to Give from the Same Source (16:12-15). The Blessed Paraclete is the link that keeps alive the relationship between the past and the future. The Holy Spirit connects the creative genius of the Father with the redemptive love of the Son and the courageous witness of the church. There is a bond that keeps history, current experience, and future hope together in Christian faith. Anglican Bishop John V. Taylor described the Holy Spirit as the "Go-between God": the God who connects past and future in a present that is full of meaning. For Taylor, what is spiritual about us is our capacity for relationship that lies at the heart of our being. **Emmanuel Y. Lartey**

We live many generations removed from Jesus' earthly ministry, but his words speak to us today. The Spirit brings his presence every day and continues the task of interpreting him in new historical settings. Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.... 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" (John 14:18, 23).

The Work of the Spirit of Truth continues to be to guide us into all the truth.... To glorify Jesus...and to confront misunderstandings of "sin and righteousness and judgment" (hamartia, dikaiosynē, krisis, John 16:8-11). The Spirit confronts the world with the sin (singular) of not receiving the love of God at work in Jesus, of not recognizing God's right-making work (i.e., God's righteousness) and the integrity of relationship between God and Jesus, and of not realizing that what God has done in Jesus brings judgment (krisis), a crisis of decision condemning the world's choice of evil (see John 12:31 and John 3:19). **Paul L. Hammer**

There were things Jesus wished to share with the disciples that they were not yet ready to receive. These things are not out of character with what he did share. However, part of the work of the Spirit has been to continue the work of Christ through the life of the church. The Spirit still speaks through the church and people of faith. This living word of God glorifies Christ in that it is an elaboration and application of the life and word of Jesus, not a contradiction or denial of it. The Spirit will help make plain and visible the presence of God in the church and the world. The life-giving presence of God manifest in creation, reestablished in the life and death of Christ, will be seen and heard anew in the church through the power of the Spirit. The community of Christ's faithful people will be connected to God and one another by the Spirit's work of guiding, leading, revealing, and reminding. Through the power and presence of the Spirit, the church is enabled to be a faithful witness to the presence of God. Through the enabling presence of the Spirit, every need for care and support we have in all of life's difficult and painful circumstances can be met. The church can draw upon the empowering presence of the Spirit to be a community that cares for and supports all persons in their times of need. **Emmanuel Y. Lartey**

Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on us.
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on us.
Break us, melt us,
Mold us, fill us,
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on us.

[David L. Bartlett (2013). Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Westminster John Knox Press. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>]