



Village Christian Church



(Disciples of Christ)

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The Work of the Spirit

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Well, my friends today is Pentecost, the day we celebrate as the birth of the Church, with a capital “C”. It’s the day we remember God sending the Holy Spirit to the disciples who were huddled in a room a few weeks after Jesus’ ascension and turned them into bold, devoted, energetic proclaimers of the Gospel.

You can read the amazing story of this event in the second chapter of Acts. There is a rushing, violent wind; flames appear above the disciples’ heads; they all begin speaking in various foreign languages; and 3,000 people joined the Jesus movement that day. In many ways it really was the beginning of Christianity and the thousands of various Churches it has grown into being today.

So, Pentecost truly is a day worth celebrating, and it’s important that we remember God gifting us, his beloveds, with his Spirit in a special way to help us grow in faith and produce the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that help us to have and live the life that Jesus calls us to.

For today, however, I would like for us to think not only about the event of Pentecost but to take a broader look at the Holy Spirit and the immensely important role it has played since the beginning of creation as God’s expression of God’s self, power and love in the world and in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is much more than just the primary actor in that even that happened in Jerusalem to the disciples and other followers so long ago... It was, and is, and always will be God’s invisible presence that carries and expresses his power, wisdom and love in the world.

So, today let’s think about and be grateful for **all** of the many ways that the Holy Spirit has been, and still is, at work in the world. The story of Pentecost is perhaps the most notable, or the one that most people would think of first, when we think about the Holy Spirit in the scriptures – But, actually, the Spirit is at work in all of the stories in the Bible. Sometimes it is mentioned and sometimes not – but it’s always there!

And it really is mentioned a **lot** more times than we tend to remember. In fact, it is almost impossible to count the exact number of times that the scriptures mention God’s Spirit, because it happens so much and there are a lot of different terms used for it.

By one source’s count, the Holy Spirit has 32 different names in the Bible! And even if we only search specifically for the name “Holy Spirit”, it appears over 90 times in the New Testament alone!

So, obviously, the Holy Spirit is very important – and, as one of the three manifestations (or identities) of God, how could it not be? I’m sure we are all familiar with the concept of the **Trinity** – the fact that we understand and relate to God as 3 persons:

- God as the Creator or Father
- God as our Savior Jesus Christ
- And God as an omnipresent, indwelling Spirit.

This does not mean that we have 3 gods, but rather that we have 3 ways of knowing, experiencing, and relating to the **one** God, which is awesome! Some churches or faith traditions do tend to focus on and talk about the Holy Spirit a lot, but it seems like we Disciples don’t tend to talk about God the Spirit as often as we do God the Creator and God our Savior...

So, let’s do a quick review of the whole body of the work of the Spirit on this day when we are celebrating the gift of it to the Church!

First, the Holy Spirit gives life. As we read in the first 2 verses of the Bible today, in the beginning the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. So, the Spirit was present and active in the creation of all that is.

Then in the second chapter of Genesis, when God creates human beings he uses his breath, or Spirit, to give us life. Think about that for a minute! Obviously, God gave life to everything that is living, but it only mentions God personally breathing his life, or Spirit, directly into us human beings – the ones made in God’s image.

Another fascinating passage of scripture about the life that God’s Spirit gives us is in chapter 3 of the gospel of John, when Jesus talks about our need to be born of the Spirit.

Then, in the story of Pentecost that we read part of today, we learn about the Holy Spirit coming upon a whole group of people and giving birth to the Church.

I think it is very apparent from these passages that a big part of the work of the Spirit is that it gives life. Life that infuses all of creation. Life to our souls as God's children made in God's image. And life to the Church as the body of Christ.

That all by itself should be enough to make us want to celebrate the Holy Spirit every day, but there is so much more that it does too!

For instance, the Spirit speaks God's words through prophets, preachers and writers. No prophet in all the Bible claims to have thought of the messages they bore by themselves... but that they were communicating what they had received from God.

I also believe that any sermon worth hearing or any essay or book on faith and theology worth reading contain messages from God that have been inspired in the writer by the Holy Spirit.

Plus, the Spirit doesn't stop its work on that side of communication either. It also enters our minds so that we are able to hear and understand messages from God – whether they are being spoken by another human being, are being revealed to us through nature and the circumstances around us or are emerging from thoughts and feelings within us.

Another thing the Spirit does is promote holiness. It does so by entering our hearts, or (to quote Ezekiel) by giving us a new heart where God's truth and love can reside. 1 Peter 1:16 calls us to be holy as Jesus and God are holy – but that isn't something we can do on our own, the Spirit of God helps us.

Another thing the Spirit does is it teaches and leads us in truth and righteousness – which is another way of saying that it helps us understand and follow God's ways which are wise, just and loving. In John 8:32 Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." And in 14:26 he said, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send.. will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you."

Another thing the Spirit does is it puts the seal upon us as God's chosen ones – making us the adopted children who can never be separated from God's love. Add the passage in Romans 8 says, "The Spirit testifies that we are God's children; and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

Another thing the Spirit does is it gives us special skills like the spiritual gifts that are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Some of the gifts listed in those places are encouragement, giving, wisdom, mercy, teaching, and leading.

But I don't think that the Spirit stops at those kinds of gifts. I think it also often gives us the physical and intellectual abilities that we might need to do something that God has called us to do.

Yet another thing the Spirit does is it helps us to develop qualities like the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that Galatians 5:22 calls the fruits of the Spirit. All of those are things that help us to live more closely aligned with God, to fulfill our purpose in God's creation, and to experience divine power and peace.

Still one more thing the Spirit does is it helps us to connect with God, in both our listening and our speaking. In fact, the passage referenced in Romans 8 on the screen acknowledges that sometimes we don't even know what to say or what we ought to pray for with God – but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

In all of those ways just mentioned, and many more, the Holy Spirit guides us into the true life that Jesus so often spoke about and God wants us to have, friends. As the person of the Trinity that can live inside of us, the Holy Spirit can help us have the faith, hope and love that we were created to experience and share. And as the indwelling presence of God in creation, the Spirit helps us to know that we are never alone.

So yes, let's celebrate the amazing event of Pentecost that occurred among the followers of Christ in Jerusalem those many years ago – and let's give thanks for the Church which was born out of it and has been empowered by it for over 2,000 years...

But let's also be reminded today that the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, has always been, and always will be, here to help us in this life and the next!

I cannot imagine what life would be like if God's only identity was that of a powerful but distant Creator and Ruler – and, thankfully, we don't have to imagine that. For God came to us as a Friend, Teacher and Redeemer in Jesus – and remains with us, as close as our own breath, as the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for listening, friends. I pray that God will bless us all with an awareness of his Spirit working in, through and around us! Amen.