

The Holy Spirit and Communion with God

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[0 : 00] Hello, everybody. Ooh, a better than average response. Well done. Well done. How about this one? Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Very good. Well done. Well done. Very good. Let's pray together. Father, we just said that we believe in the Holy Spirit, and we ask that indeed your Holy Spirit would be among us.

Of course, Lord, we ask that knowing that he's already here. You've promised that. You've promised that when we gather that your Holy Spirit will be among us, and yet we ask for an increase of your Holy Spirit.

We ask for an intensification of your Holy Spirit. We ask that your Holy Spirit will glorify you to us. That your Holy Spirit would enable us to see truth more clearly in such a way that our hearts are given over to the truth, so that our hearts are given over to you.

So we ask for the increase of your Holy Spirit in this place, in our hearts. Will you get our attention? And will you focus our attention upon you?

[1 : 29] We ask this for the glory of Jesus Christ, who died and who rose again. Amen. Excuse me. We are starting a new series tonight in the evening service.

We are going to be looking at the Holy Spirit and the Christian life over the next, I think it's a total of seven weeks. It's from now up until Pentecost, which will be toward the end of May.

Usually here at St. John's, if you've been around here at all, you know that this is the case.

Generally speaking at St. John's, what we do is we take a book of the Bible and we preach and read right the way through it.

So earlier in the year we were looking at the book of Acts and in the morning they're still going through Acts. That's usually what we do. That's kind of a normal diet at St. John's.

But from time to time, we also kind of take a break from that and do something a little different. We look at a topical series, which is what we're starting right now. Now, one of the nice things about a topical series is that it gives the preacher a unique opportunity.

[2 : 45] It gives the preacher a unique opportunity to address issues and concerns or whatever, points of growth for the congregation.

Put it that way, which is another way of saying it's a good opportunity for the preacher to get on a soapbox, which some of you can think, wow, you would think a preacher has a plenty of soapbox already.

But I will try to avoid that and simply teach the Bible as is ever the prayer that we will be about that. But one of the concerns that I would have, when I think about St. John's and when I pray about this church, about this congregation, about the congregation as a whole, one of the fears that I would have for us is that we would become a church of well-informed, well-educated, very, very well-behaved religious people.

Now, I don't know if that sounds like a, you know, if that sounds bad to you, but it sounds absolutely horrible to me. If that's all we are, then that is absolutely a nightmare.

[4 : 09] And it's a nightmare because you could, that would be a perfect description of a Pharisee. Do you know that? That would be just an absolutely perfect description of a Pharisee.

And the Pharisees, if you've read the Gospels recently, the Pharisees don't get a lot of good play, you know? Jesus, you know, wasn't, didn't think too much of them.

You see, if Christianity is simply about, you know, me being good, ticking all the kind of religious activity boxes, not doing, you know, bad things, stuff like that, then, I don't know about you, but I am, I am deeply uninterested in that.

I am, I find that deeply unconvincing. And if that's all Christianity is, then, frankly, I would want to quit my job, and turn Sundays into ski days, you know?

But, but the really good thing is that that's, you know, that's not what Christianity is about. If you look at Jesus, Jesus has a much, much bigger vision for the Christian life.

[5 : 22] But the thing is, if we are going to live out Jesus' vision for the Christian life, then that means the only way, the only way that you can possibly do that, is if we become a people who are absolutely saturated with the Holy Spirit.

And that's why, over the next seven weeks, six weeks, not including this one, we are going to be looking at the Holy Spirit. What, what's the Holy Spirit up to?

How does the Holy Spirit relate to the Christian life? Now, tonight, what I want to do, is I want to look at the second reading, John chapter 17, and I want to look at just one verse. Just one verse, the very last verse, verse 26.

And I want to ask two questions tonight. First of all, what does Jesus want for us? And secondly, how does Jesus give it to us?

First of all, what does Jesus want for us? What's Jesus' vision for the Christian life? And secondly, how does he make that vision a reality in our lives? And what we'll find, when we look at this little tiny verse, which you'll notice, does not even mention the Holy Spirit, what we'll find, when we look at this verse, is that this verse is all about the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 38] Let me show you. Okay, first of all, first question, what does Jesus want for us? What's his vision for the Christian life? We're in John chapter 17, at the very end of the reading.

Let me set the scene for just a second. This has been last night before Jesus dies. Okay, so in just a few hours, Jesus is going to get betrayed, betrayed, arrested, convicted, condemned, crucified, and he'll be executed.

He'll die. And at this point, Jesus knows exactly what's coming. I mean, there's no surprises at this point. He knows he's down to the wire.

He knows, you know, adrenaline's starting to pump. It's all coming down. It's about ready to happen, and he prays. And this reading is part of the prayer that he prays right before it all happens. If you want to find out what's really important to somebody, listen to what they pray about. Right? You usually don't pray about stuff that's not important.

[7 : 54] But if you really want to know what's important to somebody, listen to what they talk about right before they die. You don't get that opportunity very often, but you know.

And if you really, you know where this is going. If you really, really, really want to know what's important to somebody, listen to what they pray about right before they die. Now that, that's, that's what we've got here.

Jesus is praying. He knows his death is imminent. And this is the stuff that really matters to him. And when he prays, he prays about himself.

He prays about the 12 disciples. But then he also prays for us. He prays for the people that are going to follow him in the years and the centuries that follow. Now, let me ask you a question. What do you expect Jesus to pray for them about?

What, what do you expect Jesus right before he dies? What do you expect are going to be in his prayers for you and I? You know, Father, I'm about ready to die.

[8 : 58] I pray for the people who are going to follow, follow me. Make them really, really nice religious people. Just, you know, they don't do naughty, naughty things. You know, is that what he prays?

Look at it. That's not what he prays. Look at verse 26. At the very end of his prayer. Father, I made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known in order that, okay, why?

What's the main thing Jesus wants? In order that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and that I may be in them.

Now, what in the world does that mean? What in the world? Okay, let me try to explain this a little bit. The, the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity.

Right? We believe in God, the Father, God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit. We just talked about it in the Creed. And one of the things that the Bible teaches about the Trinity, one of the really important truths about the Trinity is that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have lived together in a perfect relationship.

[10:08] In a relationship of love that has been totally and perfectly satisfying and fulfilling and just the perfect kind of love that you could imagine. In fact, the Bible says that the, the love that exists within the Trinity between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is so perfect and so fulfilling that it's not, it's not exactly right just to say that God is a loving type of God.

That's true, but it's not quite right. It's actually better to say God is love. That love, perfected love is so at the core of who God is that it actually defines who He is.

You see, God's love is so intense and so perfect and so fulfilling that it makes all other kinds of love that we could possibly imagine that we know in this world, it makes it all just like a shadow.

You know, the love that we experience between each other or in this world, our love is like a shadow and God's love is like the bright burning sun.

Now, go back to verse 26. Let's read this again. I made known to them your name, Father, and I will continue to make it known. Why? In order that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and that I might be in them.

[11:41] Okay. Think with this, okay? What Jesus is praying is something like this. Father, I have enjoyed your love for all eternity.

I have, for all eternity, been utterly and perfectly satisfied in the love that you have poured out upon me for all eternity past and you will for all eternity future.

There is nothing better, Father, than the love that you have shown me for all eternity. Now, Father, I want you to give it to them.

I want you to give it to them. I want you, I want them, those people who are going to follow me, they're going to be called Christians. I want Christians to be people who are marked by knowing the love that you and I have always known for all eternity.

I want them to know love that shines like the sun and burns with perfect delight. And I want that so much, Father, that I'm willing to die for it.

[12:57] I'm willing to die so that they can have it. Now, friend, you've got to understand that you and I, we were designed for that kind of love.

We were designed for it. Some of us here are, some of us here have been religious since you were born, basically, right? You've been utterly religious and you've done, you know, all the stuff.

You've been, you've just done everything right and yet deep down you're deeply unsatisfied if you're honest. And others of us here have, you may not know why you're here but you've tried to do everything but be religious.

But if you look in your heart you know that you're deeply unsatisfied as well. This is the kind of love, this love that God, that exists between God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, this is the love that satisfies.

our hearts are made for it and so our hearts are restless until we find our home in that kind of love. And friends, this is what Jesus wants for us.

[14:09] This is Jesus' vision for the Christian life. This is what Christianity is all about. Jesus didn't die just to make us respectable.

Jesus died so that we would know love that shines like the sun. Okay. If that's something of Jesus' vision for the Christian life, how does he give it to us?

How do we, how does it become a reality in our lives? And the answer is, the answer is the Holy Spirit. Now, when you look at that verse, it doesn't mention the Holy Spirit.

But if you look at it within the context of the book of the Gospel of John and if you look at it within the context of the New Testament, particularly within the context of our first reading, which I'm not going to talk about much, but you can read it on your own, if you look at it within a broader context, it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit is the answer.

The Holy Spirit is the Father's answer to Jesus' prayer. And so what I want to do right now is walk through verse 26 and I want to show you how the Holy Spirit gives each one of these gifts that Jesus asks for.

[15:18] Okay? Now, to do that, you need to use your imagination for just a second. I need you to imagine something. I want you to imagine a bonfire right here, right next to Aaron Roberts.

Same color as his hair. Sorry, man. I had to. Anyway, I deeply, deeply, deeply enjoy building bonfires.

Probably more than I should. Although, all the guys in the room are with me. Anyways, when you build a bonfire, you start with a lot of wood, right?

Just a pile of wood, just very dry wood. And if you're adventurous, maybe a little bit of kerosene or something like that. But don't try that at home. And you need fuel, first of all, the wood. But then you need ignition. A pile of wood does not pass for a bonfire. It has to be ignited. You need ignition. And once it's going, it gives off a wonderful amount of heat.

[16:27] Okay? Fuel, ignition, heat. I want to use that as a metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. The fuel is the word of God.

The ignition is the presence of God. And the heat is the love of God. Let me show you. First, the fuel. The first thing that the Holy Spirit does when the Holy Spirit comes to answer Jesus' prayer is that the Holy Spirit opens up the word of God to us in such a way that we see God but not to see him and understand him, though that's critically important, the Holy Spirit helps us understand who God is in such a way that we trust him.

Look at verse 26 again. Jesus says, speaking to the Father, I made known to them your name, which means, Jesus means, I made known to them your character, who you are.

I made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known. Now, look at the word continue. How does Jesus continue to make God's name known?

How does he continue his teaching ministry? I mean, he died, he rose from the dead and then he ascended into the Father and he's not physically here. The answer is, Jesus continues to make God's name known through his word and through his spirit.

[17:50] It's the job of the Holy Spirit to come and help us just open our eyes so that we can see and understand the word of God clearly so that we know who Jesus is, so that we know who God is, what he's like, but it doesn't stop there.

The Holy Spirit then at the very same moment that we're coming clear and we're studying the word of God at that same moment, the Holy Spirit enables us to put our full trust and our full confidence in Jesus.

Now, both aspects are very, very important. think about a boat for a second. You can go down to the harbor and look out at all the boats that are sailing in the harbor and it's very easy to cognitively believe that boats usually float.

Now, that's good, but it's a different thing to actually step in the boat, right? to actually give your confidence to the boat and set sail with the boat.

That's a little different thing. You have to trust that the boat is not going to sink under you. You have to trust that you're not going to drown, okay? Well, when the Holy Spirit comes, he helps us understand who God is, but then he takes us a step further and he makes us trust and put our confidence in him.

[19:12] Now, at that moment, it's like we have a big pile of wood, but we still don't have a bonfire. It's really important, but we need ignition.

We need something to light the fire and the ignition is the fire of the presence of God. Look at the last few words in the verse, verse 26.

Jesus says, I will continue to make your name known so that, and then skip to those last three words, I in them. What he means is in order that I may be in them.

Jesus is saying, Father, I will continue to make your name known in order that I may somehow dwell, make my home within the life of the Christian.

Nope. This is a little bit of a harder concept, so stay with me for just a second. It's true that if you know, if you study the Bible much, you know that it's true that God exists everywhere, right?

[20:14] You can't go anywhere in the universe where God won't be there. However, Jesus is praying here that he would be present in our lives in a very unique and special way.

That Jesus would be present in our lives, would dwell within us in the same sort of special way that God lived in the temple in the Old Testament. Do you remember the temple in the Old Testament? It was the best gift that God ever gave to Israel. God's best gift to Israel was himself. God's best gift to Israel was that he had a house right in the middle of the camp of Israel so that Israelites could come to the temple and they could be with God.

They could be in his presence. And if you read the Psalms, one of the funny things about the Psalms is that when you read the Psalms, you find out that Israel's highest joy, Israel's highest pleasure, Israel's highest satisfaction was when they went to the temple so that they could just be with God.

Just be with him. Psalm 84 says, one day in the presence of God in the temple is better than a thousand elsewhere.

[21 : 30] Psalm 27 says, one thing, just one thing I ask, God, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life and to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Now, why was Israel so excited about being in the presence of God? think about this for a second. You will be most emotionally satisfied when you are with the people you love the most. Generally speaking, that's true. Assuming the relationships are healthy.

So, when you're a kid, when you were a little kid, you were most emotionally satisfied when you were with your parents because you loved your parents the most, right? Assuming your parents and you had a generally healthy relationship.

But that probably changed when you were in high school, right? In high school, you weren't emotionally satisfied when you were with your parents at all. You were very emotionally satisfied when you were with your buddies, right?

[22 : 46] Your friends. And then you fell in love. You know? And once you fall in love, you're only emotionally satisfied when you're with her or him or whatever.

Okay. You're generally most emotionally satisfied when you're with the people that you love the most. Now, when the Holy Spirit comes into the Christian life and ignites our hearts with the presence of Jesus, one of the shifts that happens is that Jesus becomes our favorite person. Jesus becomes the person we love the most. Jesus becomes the most satisfying, deeply satisfying and delightful person that we know in our entire life.

And that's why Christians, you know, that's why Christians love to pray. Christians don't love to pray because we're afraid God's going to get mad at us if we don't. Is that why?

I mean, that's why some of us pray, but that's not the way we're supposed to pray. We pray, we come to God in prayer because we want to be with Jesus. We read our Bibles because we want to be with Jesus.

[23 : 59] We gather together in church because we want to talk about Jesus and share him with one another. We tell other people that don't know about Jesus about Jesus because we like to talk about the one we love the most.

Why? Because the Holy Spirit has ignited our hearts with the presence of Jesus. better is one day with Jesus than a thousand elsewhere. So we have fuel, which is the word of God.

The Spirit gives us the ability to trust Jesus. And then the Spirit ignites with the fire of his own presence. And then when you've got a bonfire, you've got heat.

Lots of heat comes off it, which is fun. And the heat of the Holy Spirit is love. Verse 26. I have made known your name and I will continue to make it known.

Why? In order that the love with which you have loved me may be in them. We talked about this a little bit already. But, you know, everything in the Christian life is motivated by love.

[25 : 06] If we ever do anything in the Christian life that is not motivated by love, it is most likely sin. Even really good things. love. Remember the two commandments?

Aaron mentioned them at the beginning of the service. We are to love God and we are to love other people. Christianity is all about love, but it's about God's love. It's about the Holy Spirit filling us with love so that we receive love like Jesus receives love and that we give love like he gives love.

When the Holy Spirit ignites us with the presence of Jesus, love begins to radiate out from us. And that becomes, like I said, the motivation for everything in the Christian life.

Conviction of sin, holiness and obedience, ministry, fellowship, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, all of it are so many expressions of giving away the love that we have received.

And it's the Holy Spirit's job to fill us with that love. Now we're going to talk about all of these things in a lot more detail over the next few weeks. But I have a feeling that some of us here tonight are trying to live the Christian life on your own strength.

[26 : 20] It's like if you've ever been to the beach on a cold night and you'll look far away and there's a bonfire. Back to the bonfire. But, you know, it's like 50 meters away and it's cold and you're cold.

You can't feel it at all. And it's almost like some of us are trying to live our Christian lives that way. We're trying to, you know, manufacture our own heat. You know, we're doing jumping jacks or something like that.

And, you know, we're doing all the stuff that you're supposed to do as Christians but there's no joy and there's no power and there's no love and there's no warmth of the spirit. And, friends, that's... Jesus has better. And he wants us to get to the bonfire. And so, as a congregation, for the next... for these next weeks, as we lead up to Pentecost, I want to call you to a particular type of prayer. I want you to pray for yourself and for the people around you.

[27 : 27] I want you to pray that God would ignite our hearts with the Holy Spirit. That he would... you put more of the Holy Spirit in us. Ephesians 5 says that we are to be filled and go on being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We're never supposed to stop. We're never supposed to be satisfied with how much of the Holy Spirit is active in our life. And so, I want you to pray for it. I want you to pray for fuel, for the Word of God to be clear so that you trust Jesus.

I want you to pray for ignition, that the Holy Spirit would make Jesus present to you in such a way that you delight in Him. And I want you to pray for heat, that the love of God would fill us in such a way that it radiates out.

And one of the best ways to do that is, if you want to pray that prayer, look at the first reading. We're not going to talk about it now. I'm not going to say anything about it. But the first reading is a prayer from Paul, and he prays for just this thing.

It's a really big prayer that Jesus prayed, and it's a big prayer that we need to be praying. But one of the remarkable things is, don't forget, don't forget, that when Jesus prayed this prayer, he got up off his knees, he walked out, and he went upon the cross.

[28 : 44] And the reason he did that, the reason Jesus embraced the cold stone of the tomb, was so that you and I could be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

And so that we would know the fire of God's love for all eternity. And if Jesus went to such extent for us, then, you know, he's going to answer this prayer.

Jesus said, our father is a good father. If you ask him for an egg, he won't give you a stone. He loves to give the Holy Spirit.

So let's pray for it now. Father, we pray with Paul in Ephesians.

We bow our knees before you. The father from whom every family on heaven and on earth is named. And we pray that out of the riches of your glory, you may strengthen us with your spirit.

[30 : 01] Strengthen us, father, with your Holy Spirit so that Jesus may dwell in our hearts. So that we may be rooted and grounded in love.

Not love that we manufacture, but love that we receive. God in order in order that we may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and high and long and deep and broad is the love of Christ and to know the love that surpasses knowledge.

That we may be filled with all your fullness. Will you do that in us? We pray for this. And the only way we're bold enough to pray for this is we know that you are so powerful to give us above and beyond all that we can ask or imagine.

And that's why we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.