

In the Holy Spirit.

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[0 : 00] There are many consequences, as you're fully aware, that flow out of this pandemic. Normal patterns of behaviour are operating, changing dramatically for us as a church, but in broader society.

One of the consequences is that we were meant to have our regional bishop, Chris Edwards, here with us this morning, preaching at a confirmation service.

A confirmation service is where we welcome individuals into the membership of the worldwide Anglican Church, and we pray for God to empower and strengthen them by his Holy Spirit. And so part of that service requires the bishop to lay hands on each of the individual candidates and say, strengthen Lord your servant with your Holy Spirit, enable and sustain them for your service.

And given that we're not all meeting in the building today, and it's really hard to lay hands on someone digitally, then we've had to cancel or postpone our confirmation service to a little bit later.

[1 : 05] The consequence of that decision is that I have given the bishop a free pass, and I'm now up and preaching instead, which I'm very pleased to do. So if you've just logged into St. Paul's for the first time, we have been over the course of months now working our way through an ancient statement called the Apostles' Creed.

This short statement captures the way that Christians view the world and life and eternal life and the future in Jesus. And today I'm picking up the next part of that, and that is the statement that I believe, that we believe in the Holy Spirit.

So you can follow along. If you've got the St. Paul's app, if you haven't, get onto the App Store, download it. The St. Paul's app, and we've got outlines for this message and a bunch of other ways to communicate with you, so I'd encourage you to do that now.

We're picking up that point, and I've got two points, really two broad ideas. Firstly, I want to ask the question, who is the Holy Spirit? And secondly, what does it mean for us to live with the Holy Spirit? So firstly, who is the Holy Spirit? There are many things in the Bible's teaching on God which are difficult for us to understand, a bit beyond our brain capacity to deal with.

[2 : 24] It shouldn't surprise us on one level, since God is eternal and infinite, then he is so much bigger and grander than anyone could possibly imagine. But one of the challenging ideas is what James preached on a number of weeks ago now, and that is the biblical truth of the Trinity, the trinity of God.

The Trinity calls us to believe that there is one and only one God, but who dwells in three persons, who exists in three persons.

I'm going to go over the whole thing of the Trinity, but to give you a little bit of a summary, it really is an unfathomable doctrine of the Christian church. No Christian can, in the end, exhaust the meaning of what it is for God to be three in one.

And yet, at the same time, no Christian can, in fact, deny its meaning. To know the one true God is to know him as Father, to know him as Son, and to know him as the Holy Spirit.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each one of them is fully and completely God. Always and forever. And yet, as difficult it is to comprehend that, it is also a beautiful doctrine.

[3 : 51] The Trinity, if you like, functions like an orchestra. A multitude of different instruments are coming together at the right time in rich harmony. The diversity is more beautiful of a sound than if the whole orchestra was just made up with a bunch of cymbals.

Each person of the Trinity does his own distinctive work. Each contributes their own part. And together, they produce what is best and perfectly wise and most beautiful.

They work in harmony with each other as each person fulfills that part of the work, the overall work that is right and good for them to do so.

And yet, all three persons are committed to the one work of God and to contribute to the one work of God.

The Father stands on top of all the work as the one who designs and plans what the work will be. As a result, the Father is the one who is most highly praised in the end, as you can see in, for instance, Philippians chapter 2.

[5 : 07] The Son, for His part, is completely committed to doing the will of the Father. The Son has always and will always live under the authority of the Father. And so the Creed, up to this point, where we now declare that we also believe in the Holy Spirit, declares the glorious work of a triune God.

It also reveals a deep mystery of God while reminding us of our dependency upon the Holy Spirit. So let's talk about the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians fall short on their understanding of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is either faded into the background as unimportant or, in some cases, brought right to the forefront as being supremely important, the most important.

Both ends of the spectrum are deficient. As we pick up the phrase today, we believe in the Holy Spirit, there are two truths that we need to understand about who the Holy Spirit is.

First of all, the Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is not a force or like wind or electricity or something out of Star Wars.

[6 : 31] First, the second truth is that the Holy Spirit is divine. So firstly, a person. For instance, John 14, which was just read out to us, John 14, verse 16.

Jesus calls him another advocate. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth.

So when Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as another advocate or comforter, he treats the Holy Spirit as a person, not a force.

When he calls him another advocate, he means in the same way that I am an advocate. The Holy Spirit is an advocate like Jesus is. He is a person.

We also know the Holy Spirit is a person because he shows the qualities of a true and genuine person. He shows the qualities of personhood. For example, the Holy Spirit can be lied to, according to Acts chapter 5.

[7 : 33] And insulted, according to Hebrews 10. Those are two things that you can't do to your refrigerator or the electricity that's running your refrigerator. You can't lie to it and you can't insult it.

But the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force or a power. The Holy Spirit has also got personal qualities like a mind, according to 1 Corinthians 2. Emotions, according to Ephesians 4.

And a will, according to 1 Corinthians 12. But possibly the most important aspect of the personhood of the Holy Spirit is that 94 times in the New Testament, he is called holy.

He has the character of holiness, which along with having a mind, emotions and a will, is true only of a person. Now the second essential truth that we need to have clear is that the Holy Spirit is not just a person, but he's also a divine person.

That is, the Holy Spirit is God. Fully God. For example, Acts chapter 5. You might know the scene. Peter rebukes Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit about the land that he had sold.

[8 : 46] And then Peter says this to Ananias, You have not lied to men, but to God. And so when Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, he was lying to God.

We also note that the Holy Spirit has certain qualities that are only true of God, such as living forever and eternally, according to Hebrews 9, as being everywhere, Psalm 139, and having all knowledge, 1 Corinthians 2.

He's also declared to be equal with the Father and the Son in Matthew 28 and in 2 Corinthians 13. And so the Holy Spirit is both a person, personable, and also divine God.

So when you combine that second truth with that first truth about the Holy Spirit, all of a sudden he becomes somewhat more precious. It makes a great deal of difference in your life.

If you believe that you are being led, purified, changed, by a person who is, in essence, the personal God of sacrificial love, and not by some impersonal force.

[10 : 11] The person who leads and purifies and transforms is no one less than God the Holy Spirit. This is a personal relationship of God of love.

It's not a force. So what does that mean for us? What does it mean for us, therefore, to be living with the Holy Spirit? Now there's something else that's really important for us to see about the Holy Spirit.

And this is really helpful in our context that we're in right now. Those passages that were just read out to us come in the context of John 14 to 17, which is known as the farewell discourse.

This is Jesus talking about his departure. He's about to leave his disciples and go back to his father via the cross. He's talking about he's going to die and he's going to leave them.

And so the disciples are distraught. They are confused. They're bewildered. They have put their hope in him. And so what's happening to their lives is falling apart right now.

[11:15] It is uncertain times. Their whole worldview is shifting here. And in these chapters, right before Jesus is about to go to the cross and suffer, he's comforting his disciples rather than them comforting him.

He tells them that he's going away to prepare an eternal place for them in the father's house. But he's still leaving.

He's still leaving. It's great that there's going to be a bunch of rooms ready for them. It's great that they've got a home to go to forever with God and with others where there'll be no self-isolation whatsoever.

And it's a great hope for them. But the disciples are like, what about now? What happens now? And then in chapter 14, verse 16, Jesus makes this promise.

I will ask the father and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever. The spirit of truth. Jesus says to his grieving disciples, I am going to the father and he will send another advocate.

[12:38] Another, meaning another of the same kind. According to verse 16, he's going to be with them forever. He will not depart as Jesus must depart.

Now that is what these disciples need in their moment of abandonment. But is it?

I mean, is it really a word of comfort? Not that I actually can at this moment, but imagine if my wife Natalie and I were to go on a long trip right now.

And where we didn't know, it was a one-way ticket. We didn't know when we were coming back.

How do you think our children would respond if we said to them, it's okay, girls, not a problem at all. We're actually going to send another relative who you've never met. They're going to come and hang out with you and look after you until we get back, which we don't know when that'll be. I'm not sure that's an entire comfort for them in that moment.

[13:54] Hardly a comfort when you're feeling abandoned. But I think verse 23 reveals the staggering implications of what Jesus just said in verse 16.

Notice the word home there in verse 23.

It's a rare word in the New Testament. In fact, it's only used in one other place in the New Testament, and that is in chapter 14, verse 2, just a bunch of verses before, where it is translated rooms.

In verse 2, Jesus says, I'm going to the cross, and when I go to the cross, I'm preparing an eternal home for you to dwell with God forever.

A dwelling place with the Father. But in verse 23, Jesus says that by going to the cross, he is also going to prepare in us a home, a dwelling place, a room for God.

[15:17] The departure of Jesus to his Father by the cross is going to prepare two things. A room for us with the Father, with God the Son in heaven forever.

And a room for the Father and Jesus with us here on earth now in the meantime. What a promise. Not just a place with God at some point in the future, but a place for God with us right now.

The coming of the Spirit doesn't replace the presence of Jesus. It guarantees. He guarantees the presence of Jesus with us right now, forever.

The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ and the Father. Jesus, in this season, right here, and in every other season, through all the ups and the downs, is not distant.

He's not abandoned his disciples. If you're a Christian, there is no real social isolation.

[16:31] I think Jesus is actually saying to his bewildered disciples, it will be better for you when I depart.

My presence amongst you will, in fact, be stronger. It won't be as good as it will be forever when everything's perfect in heaven and there's joy forever.

But through the Spirit, he's saying to his first disciples, when the Spirit comes, it will be better for you than it's even been for the last three years when we've stood side by side and eaten together and walked together and talked together.

So, friends, how do we get this experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit right now? Especially for you, maybe, in this season where you're not feeling like it's there.

In John chapter 16, verse 13, we get a key part of the Holy Spirit's work. It says this, So, in chapter 14, Jesus promises the Spirit of truth will remind the disciples of everything that Jesus has taught them.

[18:03] And now he promises a little bit more. The 11 disciples will be led into a true understanding of the saving events which are about to take place with the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

And they, through that, will get glimpses of the future that is to come. The final climax of world history will partly, at least partly, be unveiled to them so that they will be able to get a glimpse of the sweep of God's enormous plan of salvation and the central part that Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, played in that.

But in leading them into truth, the Holy Spirit will not speak on his own. Jesus insists he will speak only what he hears.

John 16, again, if you've got your Bibles in front of you. Verse 13, But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own.

He will speak only what he hears. He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

[19:28] All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. So what Jesus is saying there in John 16 is that the subject matter of the Holy Spirit is restricted.

And it is a glorious restriction. The Spirit will take that which is Jesus's and make it known to Jesus' disciples.

And the focus here is entirely on Jesus. The role of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to Jesus. It was necessary for Jesus to be glorified by returning to the Father via the cross.

But when he leaves, he receives more glory through the work and the ministry of the Spirit to his disciples. As Jesus took that which belonged to the Father and made it known to the disciples, so the Spirit takes that which belongs to Jesus and makes it known to us.

Nothing brings more glory to the Lord Jesus than for his followers to become steeped, steeped in the truth concerning Jesus Christ.

[20:59] Of course, the acquisition of this truth is not an intellectual exercise, even though it is intellectual in its nature. It's not merely intellectual.

As this truth is truly absorbed by the followers of the Lord Jesus, it transforms us by the work of the Spirit. It makes it powerful. It enables us to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and therefore bring glory and praise to his name.

Glory comes to Jesus Christ when the truths of the gospel and the word of God are established in our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And now, so up to this point, the disciples have been confused, quite confused, characterized by misunderstanding about the person of Jesus, who he is. And all of this is going to change when the Holy Spirit comes.

The Spirit would ensure that these original disciples of Jesus are not going to forget about Jesus. He would ensure that they accurately remember the life and the commandments and the teaching of Jesus.

[22:14] How then does that happen? I think the one main answer comes from Ephesians 5, verse 18, where Paul teaches the believers to be filled with the Spirit so that their thoughts, their attitudes, their words, their actions would be directed by the Spirit.

And Paul wrote a similar thing in Colossians 3, verses 16 and 17, where he says, let the word of God dwell in you richly.

Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart to God. And whatever you do, whether word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In both of those passages, the results are the same. Words and deeds together, honoring Christ. But what brings about the results are stated differently in both passages.

In Ephesians 5, Paul says, be filled with the Spirit. In Colossians 3, he says, be filled with the word of Christ. What that means is that the Spirit will have greater influence.

[23 : 32] He will provide more direction in your life. He will give you greater comfort in times of uncertainty and anxiety. as God's word dwells in us more and more.

Word and Spirit go together. That is what John 16, 13 to 15 says, the Spirit takes that which is from Christ and makes it known to us.

The comforting words of Christ to his disciples are ours. Our reading of his word, our time spent memorizing and meditating on scripture is the main tool that the Spirit uses to help us to think, to feel, to speak, to act in ways that are more and more pleasing and glorifying to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, the goal of all biblical learning is knowing God and the Holy Spirit is crucial to this process. The Holy Spirit helps us to see the facts about Jesus Christ but even more than that, he helps us to see the glory and the beauty and the worth of what is written about Jesus Christ.

[24 : 51] He convicts us of our necessary submission and transformation, repentance of sin and obedience to Christ that follows. The word and Spirit go together.

And so the context of these verses is really crucial for us right now. They promise us that we're never alone. The Lord Jesus has not left us as orphans to do our best and to try and survive in seasons like this until he comes back.

He is not practicing social isolation from us. The promise to his first disciples extends to us. He uttered eternal words of comfort in saying the Spirit will come not only come to us, beside us, but in us.

not just dwell with us, but dwell in us, the disciples of Jesus. So Jesus promised a unity and an inexplicable bond that will exist between the people of God and the Holy Spirit.

The intimacy of the disciple of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is captured in the word abiding. the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity abides right now with you, with me.

[26 : 22] And this is a clear word for you if you are currently isolated. You are not. The God who made all things, who has control of all things, if you are in Christ, he's abiding with you right now.

The Holy Spirit's ministry of abiding restores all hope in the monk midst of hopelessness.

It secures us on a sure foundation of faith in uncertain times. The Holy Spirit therefore explains how the church not just survives, but how the church thrives and grows in seasons like this.

how the church can look beyond itself and look outside of itself to the needs of others and how the gospel continues to spread to the ends of the earth even in lockdown moments because nothing can bind the work of God in this world.

The Holy Spirit's abiding in us explains how the disciple of the Lord Jesus can hear the words of this Bible not as the words of just another human being but as God revealing truth and reality to us right now.

[27 : 49] The Holy Spirit's abiding is the reason why the disciples of Jesus have life in the face of death, have joy in the face of anxiety. Jesus promised the Spirit will abide with us forever.

the Spirit does not come only in seasons of difficulty. The Spirit does not flee when you are struggling with sin. His presence does not hinge upon your obedience and your effort.

His abiding in the Christian rests upon the infinite grace and love of an eternal God who is sovereign over all things. when as the people of God we declare together we believe in the Holy Spirit as we have this morning if you've joined us and sung with us we are confessing something so magnificent so glorious so powerful so beautiful and also so humbling.

You need to know that in this season He is with you. So friends can I just encourage you do not waste this crisis.

Don't waste this crisis. Don't turn it into another opportunity of self-centeredness. Don't turn into an opportunity of self-centeredness.

[29 : 16] Don't turn into a wonderful opportunity to have rest. But as things are forced upon us to slow down take opportunity to abide with Christ in His Word.

Individually as families worshipping together as small groups. We believe in the Holy Spirit. May the truth of this statement found in God's Word and the Apostles Creed call us to repentance and to a new and a vibrant and a fruitful relationship with the Spirit of God.

The Spirit who dwells in us and who has sealed us forever in the eternal promises of the triune God.
Amen.