

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SUBJECT: Holy Spirit

Series: Holy Spirit Here and Now

THEME: How Holy Spirit works

SERMON: Holy Spirit: Power, Purpose and Presence

Credit to Bryan Chapell (Holy Spirit and Power) Trevor Hudson – Holy Spirit Here and Now

Good morning, it's good to be with you, to study and learn together. Darlyss and I just came out of 3 weeks of quarantine because she has been sick. She is finally well and we thank you all for your support and prayers.

Introduction

Over the last several months we have come through the beginning of a pandemic that has had ramifications in so many areas of our lives. People have lost their lives. People have lost their jobs and even businesses. We have had to curtail so many of our usual activities – meeting together for worship, serving together in the community, birthday celebrations, funeral services, graduations, family picnics, visits to grandma's house, sleep overs with friends, dining out in a fancy restaurant, browsing through the craft shop, even some surgeries and medical procedures have been put on hold – and so many more.

We have had to hunker down and stay home. And I don't think anyone knows the full extent of the toll this pandemic has had, and is having on us – physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, and relationally.

In almost every area, life has been turned upside down for most people. We, the world, our nation, our communities, our families, our marriages, ourselves, we are dealing with something brand new for us. And in this case there are a lot more questions and a lot fewer answers.

To use one person's metaphor, we have been weathering a **blizzard**, now **winter** has set in, and it will seem like a **mini ice age** till we emerge in the sunshine on the other side. And it is anyone's guess when that will be.

But two questions that have been prominent in my mind and on many people's minds are: **Where is God in all of this?** And: **What are we to do now?**

I believe we can find answers. I believe we can find wisdom, and hope and peace: in the stories in The Book of Acts, in our bibles. So if you have a bible in front of you or close by, open it to Acts, right after the Gospel of John in the New Testament. We will settle down in Chapters 1 and 2 today.

In these chapters we find the stories of some women and men who must have been feeling a lot like we have been feeling. Their worlds had been turned upside down.

You see, for three years, they had followed a man – who seemed so much more than a mere man. This man was wise, understanding, loving, forgiving and compassionate. He had super powers. He could heal the sick with just a word spoken. He could raise the dead. He could feed the hungry when the cupboards were bare. He could literally walk on water.

He was humble and kind. He always put the needs of others ahead of his own needs. He despised arrogance and self-righteousness. He respected everyone and always looked out for the outcast, the oppressed, and the marginalized. He had a peace and gentleness, and a confidence about him that drew people to himself. When he said, "follow me", those who knew they could not handle life on their own, tended to follow. It seemed like he would be able to rule the world. This man is **Jesus** of Nazareth.

But then it all **ended, overnight**. He was arrested. He didn't even want his followers to fight for him. He willingly submitted to his enemies. He was mocked, bullied, beaten without mercy, disgraced and eventually put to death in the most cruel and painful way people could imagine at the time. What a spectacle of **utter failure** for the whole world to see.

His followers, understandably, ran away and hid - thinking it was all over, and their lives

and their lively hoods were the next to be taken from them. But if you were with us **six weeks ago**, you heard the marvelous good news that Jesus of Nazareth, miraculously rose from the dead – and is still alive today.

We celebrated that at **Easter**. Do you remember the **confidence** we had back then that God was really in control even as we were just heading into **stay-at-home** orders?

Back the stories in Acts.

Jesus confirmed his resurrection with his followers by appearing to them several different times over a period of 40 days. Just enough time for them to get their confidence back on track. But then he was gone again. He said he was returning to the Father – God in heaven.

Not surprisingly, the followers ran and hid again. But Jesus had made significant promises to his followers. Let me share 3 of them.

[John 16:1ff \(Jesus said\)](#)

[“I am going away to the one who sent me. It is best for you that I go away, because if I go away, then I will send \[Holy Spirit – The Advocate\] to you.](#)

Matthew:

[Matthew 28:18ff](#)

Jesus told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.
¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples... ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And [be sure of this: I am with you always](#), even to the end of the age.”

And in Acts:

[Acts 1:5ff](#)

[\[Jesus told his disciples\] John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”](#)

⁸ [You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in](#)

Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

I know I have taken a few minutes to lay the ground work for where we are going today, and these next three weeks, when we meet together around God’s Word. But it is significant to me that we recognize first, that what we are talking about **today** is **a continuation of God’s good news story for us, and for the whole world.**

I believe that the best answers for how we **conduct ourselves**, the **decisions** we choose to make; how we are to **think** about what is going on in our nation, our state and our local community; how we are to speak and prioritize, how we respond to others in our present situation, whether we agree or disagree with them: I believe all of this is best accomplished, as followers of Jesus, if we remember this:

Through Holy Spirit, God is lovingly present and always active in our lives.

Borrowing from author Trevor Hudson we have called this short series; “**Holy Spirit Here and Now**”

I share Hudson’s desire to see, for all of Christianity, and in particular for myself and us at Five Forks, “**A renewal of our witness for Christ through deeper engagement with the Scriptures and our experiences with the Holy Spirit.**” I want us to know Holy Spirit better and experience Holy Spirit more often, more intimately.

So for three weeks we want to discover, or rediscover, Holy Spirit in the bible and Here and Now – today, this week, in our lives. I want us to recognize that God really is lovingly present and always active in our lives – our ordinary, **day to day** lives – which are anything but ordinary recently. And Holy Spirit is loving present and active in every one of our **crises even this pandemic.**

This morning, just briefly, while we are together, (but I hope it will spur us to further study and contemplation throughout the week,) I want to talk to us about **Holy Spirit** and **Power**, Holy Spirit and **Purpose**, Holy Spirit and **Presence.** (From Acts chapter 1 and 2)

I. Holy Spirit and Power

There has been much talk recently about who has the authority and the power to make certain decisions. This talk and these questions have spawned much confusion, anger, hurtful words, harsh judgement, division and animosity. Sadly, we as Jesus followers have been caught up in the debates. I believe there is much apology and forgiveness that needs to be granted, by everyone, if we want our hearts to be in tune with God's heart. Let us remember where **our** Authority and Power is rooted.

Jesus said of himself: "**I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.**" The implication here is that Jesus is the highest Authority, and has the power to carry out whatever it is he wants to do. And then he says to his followers:

Acts 1:8 "**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.**"

Here Holy Spirit comes.

Acts 2:1-4

On the day of Pentecost (which, not coincidentally, will correspond to next Sunday, May 31 on our calendars) **all the believers were meeting together in one place.** ²

Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ **Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.** ⁴ **And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.** A phenomenal display of the power of Holy Spirit.

Bryan Chappell (a pastor in Illinois) shares a story about speaking and understanding other languages – as a display of the power of Holy Spirit. They were on a mission's trip with his church in a Latin American country where everyone normally uses Spanish – but none of the mission's team was very fluent in Spanish. So you know communication was a problem.

The mission's team was walking through the city on the occasion of a national celebration so it was crowded – wall to wall people. One of the participants stumbles in a pot hole near the curb and breaks his leg, horribly. Because of the crowds, the ambulance could not get through.

So the team, struggling to communicate, eventually flags down a taxi and they take their badly injured colleague to the hospital. The hospital did not have the latest equipment and Bryan and another man had to actually hold their colleague in the air to get his leg X-rayed.

Each step of the way was exasperated by their inability to understand each other's languages. As things were winding down that night, Bryan said he went out to the waiting room where one of the team members was watching TV. The gentleman looked at Bryan and said, "You know with this sudden total immersion in Spanish, I am finding I am beginning to understand what they are saying on TV."

Bryan said, 'I looked at my friend and said, "They are speaking in English on TV."' Bryan said we would have believed for sure it was Holy Spirit in action if my friend had been able to suddenly understand Spanish.

But back to Acts.

Holy Spirit began to demonstrate Holy Spirit's power by giving the disciples miraculous ability to communicate in other languages. Every language group, from around the world, present in that crowd, was able to hear God's good news story about Jesus and the salvation Jesus affords, in a way that they easily understood.

We should ask:

Who is it that receives such power from Holy Spirit?

"All the believers", we read in verse 1. Women and men.

Some in the crowds that day thought the disciples were just drunk. So Peter clarifies what is going on by referring to the prophet Joel – in the Old Testament.

God said:

Joel 2:28-29

I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your old men will dream dreams,

and your young men will see visions.

²⁹ In those days I will pour out my Spirit

even on servants—men and women alike.

Power is poured out on **all people** regardless of age, gender, race, national origin, status. Holy Spirit does not leave anybody out, or elevate one person above another.

You may think that Holy Spirit **power** is only for a few elite Christians, educated clergy, those with positions or offices in the church, influential people. The account in Acts, and the reference to the prophet Joel would indicate otherwise. Let's remember this: **Holy Spirit power is available to each and every one of us.**

What is the power for?

In broad terms Jesus essentially said it is **“To carry out the great commission – of being his witnesses and making disciples.”**

Or, as the Holy Spirit is poured out on all the believers, it **“moves, transforms, inspires and empowers the church in its mission.”** Everything we do as individual Jesus followers, and as a church is **enabled** by Holy Spirit's power.

Holy Spirit enables us to follow Jesus **in spite** of all **circumstances**. Holy Spirit gives power to **persevere**, endure, stand firm. **Paul** writes much in his letters of encouragement to fellow struggling believers, facing unbelievable hardships, of how they can trust Holy Spirit to carry them through.

Holy Spirit is at work in you, and in the world **today**. This is what Peter explains to the crowds that day. See, while huddled in the upper room out of fear, because of their problems, their opposition, circumstances, the disciples may have seemed like a desperate, defeated lot. But in steps Holy Spirit and the Church is birthed. Their seemingly insurmountable problems were actually a **platform for Holy Spirit to display Holy Spirit's power.**

Today we may be feeling that our problems are too big. Many parents and teachers are feeling overwhelmed as they try to do virtual classroom learning with their children. The financial hardship is going to crush us and destroy us. The anxiety and depression are mounting. I read recently of the growing numbers of suicides, increased drug abuse and overdose, rising domestic violence – much attributed to the measures that have been taken to keep people safe from the virus. Our problems seem just too big!

Remember, **“Our problems are platforms for Holy Spirit to act.”**

Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God and with Holy Spirit comes the power to **display God’s loving acts of grace and compassion and God’s presence in our lives.**

Oh how I want to learn to recognize that more and more, so my trust in **God** and what **he is up to** in the world becomes more evident. I desire it for myself. I desire it for each of you. I desire it for our congregation and our community. I believe Holy Spirit is far more active and present in our lives than we tend to recognize.

And this brings me to my next point.

II. Holy Spirit and Purpose

Let’s hone in a little more on what the **power** of Holy Spirit is **for** – it’s purpose. In Jerusalem that day, there was confusion and misunderstanding on that day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:5ff

⁵ There were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. ⁷ They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

¹³ But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

So Peter began speaking about Joel, David, Jesus, God and God’s good news story for the world through Jesus. He preached a sermon. And Peter concludes this way:

³⁶ “So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!” The result was:

³⁷ Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.”

The display of Holy Spirit power and activity was to **clarify**, to **make sense of**, what **God** was doing. Holy Spirit helps us ‘**get it.**’

Peter shares another account in **Acts 10**. Where he needed something **clarified**, and Holy Spirit stepped in again. The story is:

Cornelius, a Roman army officer, a gentile, who was a generally good guy in the community – devout and religious, but he did not know God’s latest chapter in the good news story. The chapter about Jesus and the cross, resurrection and forgiveness, and Holy Spirit. Cornelius didn’t know about that. An angel appeared to him and told him to send for Peter so he could hear this part of the story.

In the meantime, Peter was waiting for lunch and taking a nap. And he saw a vision about being told to eat, what he considered to be, **unclean food**. Being a devout Jew, Peter refused to heed the voice. It took three times with the vision until Peter finally ‘got it.’

Long story short, Peter goes to Cornelius’ house, something a devout Jew would not do, and tells the good news story of Jesus, and Cornelius’ whole household believes. They become followers of Jesus. Everyone lives happily ever after, right?

Not so fast. Peter gets in trouble with other believers for doing something, every good religious person is sure he should **not** do – he goes to a gentile home and eats a meal.

Listen to what happened:

[Acts 11:1ff](#)

Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. ² But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the

Jewish believers criticized him. ³ “You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them!” they said. So Peter told them the whole story – about the vision and everything and said:

15 “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning.

17 And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God’s way?”

18 When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, “We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life.”

Holy Spirit had to help even believers ‘get it’ – understand what **God** was up to.

The work of Holy Spirit is **not** primarily to amaze people with miracles and displays of power. Although Holy Spirit does that sometimes. I have experienced phenomenal displays of Holy Spirit’s power in my life, and in a few moments you will hear a story of this in the life of one of the ladies in our congregation.

But:

The work of Holy Spirit is primarily for people to ‘get it’ – to understand and recognize God is at work.

Holy Spirit testifies of **Christ** – that is, who Jesus is – the Son of God

Holy Spirit confirms in people’s hearts – the **goodness and the reality** of the grace of God in Christ

Holy Spirit gives our hearts understanding of what is going on around us.

In the face of so much confusion, misinformation, deception today, what is a follower of Christ to do? Where do we turn? Holy Spirit will give understanding of God’s agenda and it may surprise us at times.

Let me add, if our understanding of what is going on, and how we should respond, does

not line up with the character of God; if our response – our words and actions do not exhibit a trust in the timing and ability of God to intervene and be in control; if we are not speaking words that express love, and words that build up, rather than tear down; I believe we are probably listening to the wrong voice. When we do not listen to Holy Spirit, we almost always go off track. Who are you paying attention to?

And now let's talk about:

III. Holy Spirit and Presence

I have come to learn that the **Iowa caucus** is a rather unusual way of voting. In Iowa, you do not go and cast your vote in a private booth where no one can see whom you are voting for. Rather the room is set up with a space for each candidate. And at the correct time people will move to take a stand with the candidate of their choice – publicly standing **with the candidate**.

As we think about Holy Spirit and presence, think of a reverse scenario of the Iowa caucus scene.

John 14:16-17 Jesus said:

¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. He lives with you now and later will be in you. That is a reference to Pentecost. Notice the word picture.

Holy Spirit takes the initiative and **comes to stand with us**

What a beautiful and reassuring picture for us. Holy Spirit coming to be with us.

We have been struggling with the lack of being able to gather together as the church. We struggle because we know the value of being together physically. Physical presence means everything to us.

When our **children** were little and we would want to put them to bed. It was scary back in the room at the end of the hallway. So we would hold them on our laps. One or two at a

time, but always eventually all four of them, until they fell asleep – feeling safe, secure.

Then we would carry them back to their beds and tuck them in. Sometimes in the middle of the night, one or more of them would wake up and either cry out or come padding up to our room – because they were frightened and wondered where we were. We would pick them up and put them in bed with us until morning. We knew they just wanted to know, we were present. Very close. Close enough that they could reach out and touch us if they were frightened.

I would never change that part of our parenting.

In a similar way, Jesus' promise is even more intimate. Holy Spirit will be with us and even in us. No wonder Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Comforter.

Presence means everything to us. Holy Spirit is the very presence of Almighty God, and God's Son – Jesus – right with us – all the time.

Yes, I am very disappointed that we cannot be together. But I know that Holy Spirit is with us and in us, even when we are not gathered. One person observed this:

“The church may look different, but it will remain grounded in the promise of Christ to remain with us.”

I don't know what the church will look like in the future. We may have to change service times and formats – the days when we gather. How we include all ages – children and youth and adults.

But I am confident of the presence of Holy Spirit, not just in the gathered church but also in the heart of every believer every day, all the time. Every time we see people loving each other – and there are a million examples of that all over the place – we are witnessing an expression of Holy Spirit's presence.

I've asked someone from our congregation, who is helping me to learn this, come and share part of her story with us.

Here's **Ashlyn Shockey**. (Video of testimony)

PRAY

Spirit of God

Lord and giver of life,

Moving between us and around

Like wind or water or fire

Breathe into us your freshness that we may awake;

Cleanse our vision that we may see you more clearly;

Kindle our senses that we may feel you more sharply;

And give us the courage to live

As you would have us live,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen

Song: "God With Us"

BENEDICTION

"Now may God the Father, and Jesus the Son, and ever present Holy Spirit give you understanding and peace at all times and in every way. Amen."

