

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 3:18; John 16:13

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SUBJECT: Holy Spirit

Series: Holy Spirit Here and Now

THEME: Holy Spirit as Transformer and Guide

SERMON: "Holy Spirit: Change and Direction"

Credit Trevor Hudson and Jody Flemming: Holistic Pneumatology in Mission

Introduction

Good morning. It so good to meet with you again and talk some more about Holy Spirit. Today is **Pentecost Sunday**. That is 50 days after the day we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus – on Easter. This is the day we remember Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples, 120 women and men gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem.

Empowered by Holy Spirit, they left that room and went into the city and began telling **God's good news story** about Jesus. What was really phenomenal was that Holy Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak all the different languages represented that day, so the story began to spread around the world. That day the church was **born** and our coming together today is a direct offshoot of what happened that day.

Holy Spirit, so evident in Jerusalem that day is still present and active **Here and Now**. My prayer is, that we are learning to recognize Holy Spirit's **presence** in our own lives and situations. How did it go for you last week? Did you notice Holy Spirit a little bit more?

What we are going to talk about today makes me think of a story I read about Mahatma Gandhi.

The story is that Gandhi, on one occasion, was approached by a troubled **mother** who brought her daughter to see him about the daughter's addiction to **candy**. Gandhi asked the mother to bring her daughter back in 3 weeks. The mother went away and returned in 3 weeks and Gandhi spoke to the daughter simply and briefly about the harmful effects of eating too

much candy. After the talk, the mother asked Gandhi, “Why didn’t you tell my daughter those things three weeks ago?” Gandhi replied, “Because 3 weeks ago I was still addicted to eating sweet foods myself.”

This morning we want to talk about how Holy Spirit **transforms** us and **guides** us. I feel, perhaps like Gandhi, not at all qualified to talk about this with you because Holy Spirit has so much work to do in my own life. So often I live without letting Holy Spirit guide me. Perhaps we can learn together.

Today we want to talk about how:

1. Holy Spirit Transforms us Inwardly and 2. Guides us Outwardly

How is Holy Spirit transforming you and guiding you?

Just one verse to start with.

[2 Cor 3:18](#) Paul writes:

All of us who have had that veil removed, (Paul is referring to coming to trust in Jesus for salvation and beginning to understand how God is working in the world) **[All of us] can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.**

“Holy Spirit makes us more and more like him.” That is: part of the activity of Holy Spirit in the world, in us, is to change Jesus followers into the image of Christ. That is what Holy Spirit is doing here and now.

Someone said it this way: **Holy Spirit wants to change us into little Christs.**

That almost sounds blasphemous to us – ‘become little Christs – becoming God?’ No we will not be become the Savior, nor does it mean that we try to dress and eat and live like a 1st Century Jewish rabbi – wearing sandals and robes, walking everywhere. Not that kind of change.

We are also not talking about pulling ourselves up by the **bootstraps** to be better citizens and neighbors – just improving ourselves using some self-help **disciplines** or by

developing better **habits**: although those may happen to us.

We are referring to Holy Spirit working in places only Holy Spirit can touch.

We are referring to **every** part of us. The deep recesses of our souls. All our secrets. All our private thoughts. Our feelings and even our motives. Holy Spirit wants to work on everything about us. Every part of us needs to become areas where Holy Spirit works.

And this is what makes some people **resist** Holy Spirit. Sometimes we get this smug feeling that we are already **as good** as we need to be. We know there are parts of us that don't look like Jesus, but we think we want to **hold** on to them – at least for the time being.

Others are **resigned** to the thought that they cannot change or be changed. Although life is miserable and they feel like a failure – they are resigned to the fact that that is just how life will be for them. And so we resist Holy Spirit.

But thankfully, because God loves us so much, Holy Spirit keeps working, pursuing activities in our lives, turning us around and around, sometimes abruptly, sometimes slowly, changing you and me into the sort of people who look more and more like Christ.”

A father was making **pancakes** for breakfast for his two young sons. They began arguing about who would get the first pancake and the father noticed a teachable moment. He said to both boys, “If Jesus were here right now, he would let his brother have the first pancake.” The boys grew quiet for a bit and then the older boy spoke up. “Alright,” he said to his younger brother, “you can be Jesus this time.” Not the response the father had hoped for.

But when we talk about becoming little Christ, we are talking about becoming like Jesus in heart and mind. It starts internally and it is a work of Holy Spirit in us.

We begin to catch glimpses of what we are talking about as we read and study the life of Jesus in the gospels. As we meditate on **his** teaching about the **good life**. As we observe his encounters with **hurting** women and men. How he confronts injustice and prejudice. As He embraces unfair condemnation, watching him as he dies on the cross as a common criminal.

The gospel stories are fascinating. I hope we never grow weary of reading them and re-

reading them, again and again - meditating on them. Letting the life of Jesus soak into our own souls. Holy Spirit works in us to make us like Jesus.

I want to draw our attention to just **three** characteristics of:

I. Jesus' Gospel Life

Throughout his earthly life **Jesus remained his own person** – in whatever circumstance or situation. Jesus knew he was God's beloved Son. He knew God's will for his life – and he followed it. When it was time for him to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and his family tried to dissuade him from going, he would not be dissuaded. Jesus was not swayed or influenced or sidetracked by what people thought of him. He reprimanded when someone needed a scolding. But he also graciously restored those who were ready to give up. He had no hidden agenda. He did not use popularity to seize power for himself. In fact he rejected that.

When he was tired, he rested. When he needed to get alone with God, he did that. When he was moved with compassion he acted to relieve the suffering. When an example of humility was needed, he, being humble, grabbed the towel and basin and washed the others feet. It's who he was. Jesus knew who he was and was always his own person.

I believe Holy Spirit wants to free us to become the unique person God desires us to be. We don't have to live life trying to be someone we are not. Who are you trying to be? Who is Holy Spirit transforming you into?

Darlyss and I have four children. 3 boys and then our youngest is a girl - our daughter, Andi. So she has three older brothers, and a dad, who are all, always pretty sure that they are right and know best. It can be rather daunting for a young girl to navigate in life, and make her own way.

For too long, poor Andi was trying to be someone she wasn't, I think mainly to win her family's approval and fit the 'Kipe' mold. Sadly, I foolishly tried to help her become who I thought she should be. I will be honest – there was a palpable stress and tension in our home because of that dynamic. It was not pretty. I remember so vividly the time, by God's grace, and

Holy Spirit's persistent use of a spiritual 2 x 4 to my head, I came to realize I was not allowing, or helping Andi to become the person **God** created her to be.

It was like a light bulb went on in my head. I had to apologize to my daughter and ask for her forgiveness. I had to make significant changes in how I encouraged her, and related to her. When Holy Spirit was finally able to get it through my head, Andi was freed to become the person God had always intended her to be.

What a change it made in our whole household. We didn't immediately become a perfect family by any means. We're still working on that and will always have to work on it. But I give that illustration to make the point: **Holy Spirit is at work in each of us and wants us to be free to be the person God intends us to be so we don't have to live carrying the burden of faking it.**

Perhaps you picked up on a statement Ashlyn Shockey made last week as she spoke about how Holy Spirit was working in her life, at a very difficult time for her. She said, "**Holy Spirit gave me the courage to be who God has made me to be.**" Oh what freedom that is.

Another thing we observe in Jesus' gospel life is:

Jesus had an incredibly loving relationship with people.

People, all people, matter to Jesus. He acknowledges the sacred worth of God in every person, especially in those who have been written off as inferior, worthless or unacceptable.

We see it when he hugs a little **child**, the busy adults want to push aside. We see it when he reaches out to touch an unclean, rejected **leper**, and says, "I want to heal you." We see it when he is politically incorrect and sits down to a meal with a **tax collector**, when he shows acceptance to a used and abused **prostitute**, and even the consideration he shows for his **mother's future** as he hangs on the cross.

Jesus treats all people with immeasurable respect and thoughtful care.

His love and compassion convey to the person he meets, the realization that they too

are God's beloved. As I was thinking about this and my constant penchant to set people straight with my knowledge, rather than convey the love of God to them, Holy Spirit brought to my mind,

[1 Corinthians 13:2](#)

If I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.

Holy Spirit has so much work to do in me to make me a little Christ in the area of loving all people incredibly.

Another outstanding feature of Jesus' gospel life is:

Jesus had a radical confidence in God

Jesus had this relationship with God as his intimate Abba Father – his endearing daddy. Jesus' dearest passion was to do his Father's will. Holy Spirit was in him - the Spirit of Christ. This loving union between Jesus and his Father and Holy Spirit is the very center of his life.

Jesus was only and always about doing what the Father wanted, saying what the Father said, and trusting his Father's purpose, will, plan and power, including even God's **timing** for things. Holy Spirit enabled that relationship. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, all part of it together.

On several occasion, when people urged Jesus to do something, Jesus said – **“Not yet, it's not the Father's timing.”** As he approached the cross, he cries out, to his Father, **“Not my will but your will be done.”**

Peter recalls Jesus' radical confidence in God when he writes:

[1 Peter 2:23](#) [Jesus] did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

Two weeks ago Pastor Bill spoke so reassuringly to us as he talked about how we can have inner joy in the midst of the pandemic and shut-down, stay at home orders. I found his words so helpful, but the phrase that etched in my mind was a simple one. Three words.

“God’s got this.” Oh how I needed to hear that. Jesus lived his whole life with the view that, “God’s got this.” Holy Spirit kindled Jesus’ confidence in his Father.

I believe Holy Spirit is reminding us, here and now – whatever we are going through – “God’s got this.” Holy Spirit, help us believe.

Holy Spirit, help us have a radical confidence that ‘God’s got this.’

Becoming little Christs is a **journey** we go on. It is not instant. It is not a straight line. Sometimes it feels like one step forward and two steps back. Sometimes I can be so compassionate and respectful and loving. But time and again I find myself behaving in ways, or thinking thoughts, or harboring grudges and planning revenge in ways that are not at all Christ like.

It can be a simple thing like being **impatient** with the person in front of me in line whom I think is taking too long.

Or big things like wishing ill and even injury on a person with whom I disagree. People don’t know what I am thinking – but Holy Spirit does. And Holy Spirit works ceaselessly to transform me into the person God wants me to be.

Becoming a little Christ requires **patience** and **perseverance**. It requires **cooperation** with Holy Spirit on my part. Where I allow Holy Spirit to reveal those areas Holy Spirit wants to work on. Where I confess and repent and receive forgiveness. And then move out with the resolution to allow Holy Spirit to transform me.

And the journey of transformation almost always requires the involvement in my life of **other people**. So often Holy Spirit uses a trusted person in my life to help me ‘get the message.’ Someone who will lovingly rebuke me. Or critique a statement I make, or challenge a view or opinion I hold.

Whom are you allowing into your life, that Holy Spirit might use in Holy Spirit’s work of transforming you?

Reflecting Christ in our daily lives is about growing into the special and **unique** persons God wants us to be. It means becoming permeated by the God type of **love** that we see in Jesus for all people. It means coming to know Abba Father as intimately and **confidently** as Jesus did.

These three aspects allow Holy Spirit change you and me inwardly into little Christ's.

But the journey **does not stop** with just inward transformation. It continues with outward expression or visible behavior.

I often spend time with people who want to make **good, wise, sensible decisions** that reflect the character of Jesus and faith in God the Father.

There is this unmistakable and unavoidable **connection in scripture** between who we really **are inwardly** and how it **shows outwardly**.

So as Holy Spirit transforms us into little Christs, Holy Spirit also guides our decisions and choices so there is a **consistency** between what we say we believe and how we live.

Time and again in the encounters Jesus has with people, it results in changed behavior. I want to be clear. We are not talking about becoming better people so we can be closer to God, and have a clear conscience. Rather it is love and obedience to God that Holy Spirit works in our lives.

There is this constant tension it seems, for Christians down through the ages, between obeying Christ legalistically, and obeying out of love for Jesus. I love a statement I read recently by one of the ladies who is part of our congregation. She said in regards to obeying the Law of God found in scripture:

“We soar above the Law, not because we are better, but because we are free.”

Shelia Cooper

So profound. I think it points to this work of Holy Spirit in us which is about both freedom in Christ and obedience to Christ. So:

II. Holy Spirit Guides the Outward Expression of Our Inward Transformation

If we are followers of Jesus, how do we decide what to do? Remember the bracelets some years back WWJD – **What Would Jesus Do?** A very simple statement to remember but we have found it to be far more complex as we try to live life. Fortunately Holy Spirit does not leave us floundering on our own.

And we are not content with just knowing the words of Jesus. Pastor Chris said it so well a few weeks ago. We don't want to be people who can just quote memory verses from the bible. We want to know **how to live**, and live that way, **because** we know those bible verses, and have let them become a part of who we are, as Jesus followers.

Jesus made this promise to his disciples, and I believe it applies to us, here and now.

[John 16:13](#)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.

We believe there has to be a consistency between what is **inside** of us and our **outward** expression. Author Jody Flemming says it this way.

“The agreement of inner and outer lives of believers is an “essential and necessary unity.” Holy Spirit’s work in an individual, through faith and regeneration/transformation must be expressed outwardly through a “life of discipleship and obedience.” (Flemming)

In other words, Holy Spirit, as well as transforming us inwardly to the very core of our being, will also help us make decisions. Holy Spirit will lead us if we let him.

We tend to say, “We want to do this – Holy Spirit come and bless it, or make it happen.”

The hard part for us is learning to let Holy Spirit **lead**.

Or we may **invoke** Holy Spirit in order to get someone to do something. Have you ever had someone tell you, “Holy Spirit told me to tell you...” or Holy Spirit told me do this or that...”

Those are difficult words to hear and argue against. But sometimes they just don't seem to ring true in our hearts and we are pretty sure it was not Holy Spirit doing the guiding in the decision.

I have to replace the cylinder head on my **riding lawn mower**. I was almost scared to death to try it, but even more frightened to hear what the repair shop would say it would cost for them to do it. So I went to the "spirit of Youtube" for advice.

I asked, "Can I change the cylinder head on my riding mower." The spirit said, in the form of a very well done video, "Of course you can. Here is the step by step process. Just follow my instructions exactly." I believed enough to buy the parts, but have yet to act on the spirits leading, so my riding mower is still waiting. So I don't know for sure if I am being led by a reliable spirit or not. The real question for us today is:

How do we know if it is Holy Spirit leading us in our decisions of life?

How do I know if I have understood God's will for my life? What if I get it wrong? Many people live in fear that they may not choose God's will exactly. And then they will forever mess up God's plan for their life and their lives are destined to be miserable from then on. We do not need to be bound by a very narrow understanding of God's will.

Let me suggest 3 confirmations we can look for as we wrestle with decisions. I believe:

Holy Spirit guides us in Freedom

What I mean is: I believe a healthier way to learn to think about God's will is to realize that God has given us **guidelines** to help us exercise the freedom to make decisions responsibly in our lives.

We have the gift of **Scripture**, the gift of **counsel** from other Christians and the gift of our own **reasoning** and **imagining** abilities and also the gift of our own **conscience**. They all help us make decisions. And **Holy Spirit** guides us into the right decisions, and influences our thinking and our perspective.

But in the end we have to choose to do what we honestly believe to be most in tune with God's heart. When we follow this approach we can say God wants us to be free as we make our decisions.

Remember, Peter was pretty sure God would not want him to go and eat with Cornelius. Holy Spirit guided his decision in a different direction.

On the other hand, this freedom does not mean anything goes. The scripture is clear there are some things God hates, things that break God's heart and we are to steer away from those.

Holy Spirit (also) guides us in Peace –

I was struck by Ashlyn Shockey's testimony last week when she said, as Holy Spirit ministered to her, "I sensed this 'peace' come over her." Have you ever experienced a special peace about a particular decision?

Holy Spirit gives us a deep sense of peace with decisions that we make, if those decisions are in line with the character of God's heart. It leads us to feel calm, confident, and encouraged.

On the other hand, if we sense unease and disquiet in our spirits, it should give us pause to reconsider the decision. The Apostle Paul used this method.

2 Cor. 2:12-13 I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, ¹³ [But] I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia

Paul was preaching the gospel, a good thing, but the peace of the Spirit was not present, so Paul changed his decision. Look for a deep 'peace' about your decision.

Holy Spirit (also) guides us in Consensus

This is a tough one for a culture so steeped in the practice of voting about everything. Every time we turn around there is another poll. Most times we are convinced that majority should win. And we hope the majority is correct – we usually think they are if we voted with the majority.

There is another way to arrive at making decisions. It is the method of consensus. Where we **talk** and **consider** and **change our minds**, talk some more, reconsider until we all agree. No one digs their heels in and demands their own way – refusing to come to consensus.

In Acts we read about a conflict in the church over some Jewish traditions and laws. They called a council meeting. Here is how the matter concluded.

Acts 15:28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

Holy Spirit led the church and seemed to join in a decision by consensus. They all chose to come to agreement. Holy Spirit led them to unity.

While we have all been away from the church building, we have been working on new signage around here. I think you will love it when you get back to church. Well, to arrive at the **best wording** for the signs, how **big** the letters should be, **where** the signs should be placed and so, was quite a process. We worked and re-worked until we all came to agreement. It was a lengthy process, but the results were very good. I believe Holy Spirit guided us in consensus. Working to consensus promotes unity in the body.

Here is how Jesus prayed for his disciples. Not just back then, but even here and now.

John 17:23

I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

“The unity of Holy Spirit will help us find more in common, than focusing on our differences, as we seek to live out the Kingdom of God on earth.” (Flemming)

Three areas you can look for consensus:

Consensus in your **family/household** decisions

Consensus in the **congregation**

Consensus in your **personal decisions** – as we receive insight and advice from others on what we should be doing or not doing in our service for the kingdom of Christ.

I believe **unity** among believers is **precious** to Holy Spirit and it should be precious to us. I believe unity is an outward expression of inward transformation that Holy Spirit works in the lives of all Jesus followers. May we be humble enough to let Holy Spirit regularly bring us to consensus and complete unity?

Along with the bulletin on line, we have made a resource available to you, about how you can learn to **discern** Holy Spirit’s direction in your life. It’s called an “**Exercise of Discernment.**” I invite you to make use of it in your life this week as you make decisions.

PRAY

Exercise of Discernment

Each day presents us with countless choices. Some are significant. “Should I change jobs?” “Must I tell my kids about my diagnosis of cancer?” “Should I mention to my friend how his comments hurt me last night?” “How do I talk with my partner about my unhappiness in our relationship?”

Some may seem rather trivial. “Shall we go to the movies tonight?” “What will I make for supper?” “What do I wear for the interview?” If we want to become more responsive to the Holy Spirit’s leading, we need to discern the Spirit’s movement in our lives. Discernment, as one of my favorite writers puts it, involves practice in prayerful attention to the inner movements of our hearts, prayerful reflection on them, and honest appraisal of what seems most in tune with God’s purposes.

This sounds like quite a mouthful, so let me take you through a simple exercise.

First of all, **invite God** to be with you in this process. Tell God that you really want to follow and be obedient wherever the Holy Spirit may lead. This is an important part of the exercise. You are sharing with God your intention to be faithful no matter what God may want you to do. You need to be honest about this. If you are ambivalent about doing God’s will, share these mixed feelings with God.

You can pray something like, “God, there is one part of me that wants to do your will and another part of me that doesn’t. Please help me to want to do your will with all of myself.” God meets us where we are.

Second, **think/meditate** about the issue you are facing right now about which you need to make a decision. Do not evaluate its importance too quickly. Many everyday decisions have huge implications. Choices, as we know, always have consequences.

Write down the issue that is facing you on a piece of paper, together with any thoughts that may come while thinking about it.

Most probably, there will be a number of possible choices open to you regarding this particular matter.

Note these different choices. Continue to do all this as consciously as you can in God’s presence, in an atmosphere of prayer, and with an openness to follow however the Spirit may lead you.

The **Third** step may take a few hours. **Imagine** yourself making a certain choice. Stay with it as you go about your day. See yourself following this decision.

Then **stop and evaluate** how you feel in your heart about this decision. Are you at peace with it? Is it in sync with all that you know of God from your understanding of the scriptures? Does it seem to lead toward greater faith, hope, and love in your heart? Or does it, on the other hand, leave you with a sense of disquiet and unease?

Repeat this process with **each of the possible options**. Keep yourself open to whatever path the Holy Spirit may lead.

Record your thoughts if you can.

At this point, the discerning occurs. You pay attention to the feelings that your thoughts about the different options create in you. You are trying to discern which option brings you a **deeper sense of peace**. The Holy Spirit usually leads where there is a strong sense of God's peace. More often than not, feelings of joy and well-being will accompany this peace.

The general rule of thumb underlying the approach is this: If our basic orientation in life is an honest desire to do God's will, it follows that whatever decision is in tune with God's purposes for our lives will bring us peace and joy. When a decision is not in sync with God's purposes, it will cause us to feel at odds with God and leave us unsettled and uneasy.

The **final step** in this discernment process involves actually **making your decision and going ahead with it**. If you consider it to be a weighty decision, it will be wise and helpful to **talk over your decision with trusted friends before moving ahead**.

In other words, you do your best to discern God's way forward for your life, as well as pay attention to the thinking of those around you about the matter at hand. This is where the **principle of consensus** comes in.

Faithful discernment in decision making is seldom an individual enterprise. More often than not, the Holy Spirit guides us through both our own thinking and the feelings it generates, as well as through the insights that come from others.

You may find the above process rather laborious. I have discovered that the more I practice it, the more it becomes part of the way I live. As we go through the above steps of discerning God's way in our lives, it initially feels a bit mechanical. But as the Holy Spirit meets us in these efforts, the discerning process becomes easier and freer.

We begin to see why discernment in the Bible is both something that comes from God and something that we have to do. (See 1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Thess. 5:21.) When we have decisions to make, we need to hand ourselves over to the Holy Spirit.

Rather than trying to guide the Holy Spirit, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. Too often we make our decisions and claim the Spirit's guidance afterward. Instead, as we act in God's good-news story in our story, we must listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Thankfully, this listening is more possible than we think. The Holy Spirit is always present with us, always communicating within our experiences, in order to guide us in all our decision making. Let us resolve to give ourselves over in every way to the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is truly our best spiritual director!

SMALL-GROUP CONVERSATION STARTERS – If you want to discuss this exercise with others.

Icebreaker: What is your approach to making decisions?

1. How do you go about seeking God's will for your life?
2. How do you respond to the idea of "more than one correct option for" God's will for you?
3. How do you discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in your life?
4. In what ways do you invite the help of others in your decision making?
5. Share one area of your present life where you are seeking to discern God's will for for your life.

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