

The Building Blocks of Belief:
“We Believe in the Holy Spirit”

John 14:15-18, 25-27

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Let us begin this sermon with a prayer. Let us pray:
“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
And kindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created
And you shall renew the face of the earth.
O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit
Did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
Grant that by the same Holy Spirit
We may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations. Amen.

We believe in the Holy Spirit. We baptize our people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The word John uses to define the Holy Spirit is Paraclete—the one called along side another.

The Holy Spirit is like a witness who takes the stand for a friend. The Holy Spirit is like an attorney who defends her client in court. The Holy Spirit is like a specialist who is called in to solve a problem. The Holy Spirit is like a soldier who arrives to replenish the front lines.

On the eve of his departure, Jesus says to his anxious disciples, *“I will ask the Father and he will give you the Paraclete to be with you forever. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him, but you know him for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD WITH US.

On Friday of this week, I visited a dear friend of mine who is hospitalized with severe mental depression. This fun-loving, church-going, former bank president who is like a father to me, was sitting motionless on the side of his bed. His eyes revealed his despair. “I’ve lost contact with the Man upstairs,” said Hiram as I gripped his hand. “I know,” I said as I felt his sadness. “But sometimes it’s not our grasp of God but his grip on us that sees us through. I am counting on God to see you through.” With almost a smile on his lips, Hiram said, “I sure hope that’s true.”

God is with us. When we know it and when we can’t imagine it, God is with us. When we feel it and when we can’t fathom it, God is with us. The Psalmist said it best: *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are*

there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:7-10).

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). Will Campbell grew up on a Mississippi farm and graduated from Yale Divinity School. He went back to Mississippi engaging himself in the civil rights struggle of the 60’s. A devout Christian, Campbell found himself hated by most churches in Mississippi who were determined to keep African-Americans out of their churches as well as their schools.

Campbell became friends with P.D. East, an agnostic newspaper editor who couldn’t understand Will’s commitment to Christianity. Driving down a rural road one day, P.D. says to Will, “You insist on being Christian. Tell me in ten words or less what that means.” Without looking up Will responds, “We are all bastards, but God loves us anyway.” Things got deathly quiet. Will didn’t know that P.D. was an illegitimate child and had been called “bastard” many times as a kid. After a long silence P.D. said, “YOU GOT TWO MORE WORDS; YOU WANT TO TRY AGAIN?”

Whatever your earthly family may be like, I am here to tell you today, God is our father, Jesus Christ is our brother, and the Holy Spirit is our mother. We belong to the family of God. There are no orphans here today. *“The Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”*(V. 16,17). You have an inheritance. You are in the Father’s will.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WISDOM FOR US.

A pilot, a business executive, a pastor and a Boy Scout were flying together on a small private plane when they suddenly experienced engine trouble. Within a matter of minutes the pilot said, “This plane is going down. Furthermore, I have noticed we have only three parachutes on board. I have a wife and children at home. They are expecting me for dinner.” With that the pilot took a parachute and jumped. Immediately the business executive spoke up and said, “Some people think I am the smartest person on earth. If I should perish in this plane, it would be a great loss, not just to my company, but to the world.” With that, he grabbed for a parachute and jumped. That’s when that pastor turned to the Boy Scout and said, “Son, you are young and I am old. You have your life ahead of you. I’ve finished mine. Take the remaining parachute and jump.” But the Boy Scout said, “Relax Reverend. The smartest man in all the world just took my backpack thinking it was a parachute.”

When the Holy Spirit comes, he will teach you all things (V. 26). Did you have a favorite teacher? What was he or she like? Great teachers awaken us to possibilities, enlighten us to truth, sensitize us to others, and give us tools to carry on. The Holy Spirit is like a good teacher.

Has your education made you truly wise? Has your education made you a friend of all good causes? Has your education made you a Good Samaritan to the least? Do you see anything to love in a little child? Would a lost dog follow you in the street? Do you enjoy being alone? Do you believe in the dignity of labor? Can you look into a mud puddle and see the blue sky? Can you go out in the night, look up in the sky and see beyond the stars? Is your life linked with the infinite?

Wisdom is more than facts, figures, and formulas. Wisdom is discernment. Wisdom is truth, but the right truth at the right time for the right reason to the right person. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5).

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS POWER IN US.

With every “ought” of the gospel, there is power available that says you can. We ought to love our enemies—the Holy Spirit says we can love our enemies. We ought to forgive. The Holy Spirit says let me help you forgive. We ought to serve the least. The Holy Spirit gives us a passion for the least. We ought to live a Christ-like life. The Holy Spirit guides us into a Christian life. Why say you ought without the power to say you can!

A little boy was on a camping trip with his dad. At dusk they found a place to camp for the night. As they prepared the camp site, the little boy tried to push a rock close to the fire, but the rock was too heavy. “Use all your resources,” said the dad as the kid complained of his inability. “I am using all my resources,” replied the kid as tears filled his eyes. “You haven’t asked me to help!” said the dad as he reached out to assist.

It is hard to understand why Americans are so out of shape. We continually rack our brains, wrestle with problems, search for solutions, jump to conclusions, and sort things out. Certain groups of us are always bending the system, skating on thin ice, breaking promises, bending the rules, climbing the company ladder, rocking the boat, and flying off the handle. Some people work hard splitting hairs, stirring up trouble, running amuck, digging up dirt, twisting things around, pushing their luck, slinging mud, carrying things too far, spreading rumors, poking fun. Other people like to throw their weight around, dodge responsibility, shoot the breeze, pass the buck, beat around the bush, punch the clock, wipe the slate clean, paint the town, and capture the moment. In fact, we will do almost anything but ask for help.

As you push against the heavy loads of life, have you asked the Holy Spirit to assist you? As you wade through deep grief, have you asked the Holy Spirit to comfort you? As you try to make difficult decisions, have you asked the Holy Spirit to counsel you? As you seek your way along the road of life, have you asked the Holy Spirit to guide you? He is ready to help you. He will carry you through.

In a few moments, we will gather for Holy Communion. In the great thanksgiving we will pray, "Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world." Come, Holy Spirit, Come.

