

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, October 1, 2023

"Moravian Essentials: God the Spirit as Sustainer"

"Young at Heart" Message

I am going to stand still and I'm not going to talk. I want you all to raise your hands when you believe I'm breathing out. If you believe I'm breathing in or holding my breath, keep your hand down. Only raise your hands when you believe I'm breathing out.

How do you think you did? Was it hard to tell?

OK, we're going to try again but this time, I'm going to hold a balloon up to my mouth.

Raise your hands again when you think I'm breathing out.

It was much easier to tell this time, wasn't it?

This exercise is intended to demonstrate something about the Holy Spirit. Anyone want to take a shot at what it shows us?

The exercise was intended to demonstrate that even when we can't see the Holy Spirit with our eyes, it is still there.

And, if we are looking hard enough, there is evidence of the Holy Spirit everywhere. If I had invited one of you up to put a hand in front of my mouth, or place a hand on my shoulder or even on my stomach, that person would have been able to use more clues to determine if I was breathing out, in, or holding my breath.

In the same way, there is evidence of the Holy Spirit all around us - sometimes, it is a matter of choosing to believe what the evidence tells us. And that can, for some people, be more difficult than it might seem.

The Message

Today, of course, we are talking about the third of the six Moravian Essentials: The Holy Spirit as blessing, sustainer, or sanctifier.

The Holy Spirit is also the third element of the Trinity, and according to Moravian theology, it is the last of the essential actions that God takes for us.

The Holy Spirit can also be the most difficult to explain or articulate because the Spirit contains less concrete properties.

The Spirit works in our lives in so many ways that it is impossible to fully grasp or understand it as something concrete and evident.

Scripture says a lot more about how God the Father and Jesus Christ interacted with people than it says about how the Holy Spirit interacted with people. We can see evidence of God's creation all around us on a daily basis - evidence of the complexity of the natural world and of human existence.

Scholars also largely agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person who lived until his mid-thirties. There is evidence in canonical scripture writings but also in non-canonical writings outside of the Bible. But the Spirit is less concrete and more mystical.

The Spirit exists around us, within us, and through us.

The Spirit can be found in the whispering of the trees, the babbling of a brook, and the chirping of the birds on a spring morning.

The Spirit can touch us through other people, through other living beings like animals or even plant life. We can be *moved* by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit prompts us to desire a relationship with God. The Spirit assures us of our relationship with God and moves us to accept Christ's gift of salvation.

The Holy Spirit also helps us continually discern God's presence in our lives and the world.

If we are able to really be in tune with ourselves - to really be self-aware and know our own priorities and our own spiritual being, then we can find it easier to listen to the Spirit guiding us.

This can sometimes, or perhaps even often, be mistaken as our "gut instincts" - that moment when we just know our gut is telling us something.

Many people struggle with this - living on their gut instincts, never realizing that it is the Spirit at work in their life.

God knows when we need slow and intentional, gradual pushes. This is where the Spirit can sneak into our lives without us even being fully aware. For some people, the presence of the Spirit is something they are very aware of, but for others, it needs to be subtle.

It can be easy to wonder how to know if a decision we've made has truly been guided by the Spirit, or if it was simply our own gut feeling.

Either way, God knows when we need gentle and loving guidance. One way God does this is to place people in our lives that can help us with discernment.

The Spirit often works through people we know well, and sometimes even through people we just met. I have felt the Spirit's presence in so many people since coming to Calgary, and it is a wonderful thing!

I'd like to invite us all to take a few moments to recognize people that the Holy Spirit chose to work through to impact your life. If you feel called to do so, I invite you to say their first names out loud as we contemplate this important question.

As I did this exercise myself, I thought about so many people: my parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, certain teachers, coworkers, mentors, and friends. And of course, the Spirit is at work among all of you as I have the opportunity to be your Pastor and learn and grow with you.

And as I was thinking about all of these people, I realized that most of these people probably never thought about the Spirit working through them *for me*. So it begs the question: is the Spirit working through me for other people and I don't realize it? When and how is the Spirit working through *you* to impact other people?

When we ask the question this way, it gives us pause to think about how our actions, words, and behaviors might be impacting others. We never know when the Spirit might be using us to impact the people around us. This might be a scary thought for some of us, but for me this gives me some comfort - perhaps even a sense of purpose.

If we can recognize that at any given time, the Spirit might be working through us for other people, we suddenly realize that we are needed and important, even when we may not feel like it.

When I was in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), I worked with a woman who was 97 years old and bed-ridden. She could no longer stand on her own.

As she questioned why God was keeping her here, she realized that many of her caregivers started telling her that she was the highlight of their day - she cheered them up and brightened their day, and they were happy when they got to work with her.

She commented that perhaps that's why God was keeping her here - to care for others even though she can no longer care for herself.

And that was incredibly insightful I think. She recognized, even if she couldn't put her finger on what it was exactly, that the Holy Spirit was moving within her and working through her to impact the lives of those around her, even while she was bed-ridden and nearing the end of her days. Even though it looked different than it ever had before, and she was in a very different season of her life.

And that is just one of the infinite ways the Spirit helps us to connect with God. It may not seem concrete, but it is a gift of mystery that we have been offered by God to bless and sustain our lives and our wellbeing. The Spirit is also known appropriately as Advocate, Mother, Comforter, Guide, Wind, Breath of God, Encourager, Counselor, and Spirit of Truth and Wisdom.

God's gift of the Spirit is the Good News for each of us, every day. The Holy Spirit equips and empowers us, giving each of us our own unique gifts for use in ministry and in life. All of these unique gifts are important and necessary, and they must be exercised with love. Each of us has a significant role to play in God's work, and no one is unimportant. May this news offer you peace and a sense of purpose, and may you always remember that you may be doing the work of the Spirit in someone else's life at any given moment. Amen.

Let us pray:

God in Heaven, we thank you today for providing us with the Holy Spirit as our Advocate and Guide on our journeys. We ask that you help us to recognize the movement of the Spirit in ourselves, in other people we interact with, and in the natural world.

God, we ask that you help us to take a moment to listen for the Spirit in the wind as it rustles the trees, in the crackle of a fire in the fireplace, in the sound of rain pattering on the roof, in the smell of lilacs blooming in the spring, in the sight of an eagle carrying a fish back to its family, in the warm embrace of a loved one, and in so many other small gestures that bring us peace and comfort.

Today we pray that anyone who feels hopeless or worthless, or feels like they are not needed or loved realizes that the Spirit works in ways that they might not even know, and that one small gesture might have a huge impact on the people around them. We thank you for providing us with the gift of the Spirit, Lord. All of this we pray in your name. Amen.