

**“THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”**

*John 16:4b-15*

It's getting closer. The time when Jesus will have to leave his closest friends and followers is drawing inexorably closer. And he continues his lengthy farewell speech in the verses we've read this morning. Since almost the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus has been trying to prepare his disciples for his inevitable departure. Of course, they must have known that one day he would leave them, that he would die, as all of us do. They just thought he might have lasted a bit longer – or, at least, might have achieved some of the things that he was so often telling them about. Where was this “Kingdom” he had been making so much fuss about? Where was the obvious rule of God in this little occupied territory of the Roman Empire? Where were the justice and righteousness that he – and the Hebrew prophets before him – had been promising? Surely he couldn't be leaving yet. There was so much more to do, so much more to say.

So Jesus is trying to explain. It all seems so obvious to us, with the benefit of two thousand years of hindsight, but for them it just didn't make sense. And as Jesus makes his departure explicit, he reveals that he has a bit more to tell them. There are things they need to know about what's going to happen next. And what's going to happen next can't happen until he is gone. For the inauguration of this Kingdom, this righteous reign of God, it is necessary for some other things to take place – the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus must take place. Only then can the promised Holy Spirit arrive. Only then can the Kingdom of God be inaugurated. And the Holy Spirit's presence is one of the key markers of this Kingdom, one of the sure signs of God's holy rule. So this departure of Jesus – so untimely to human eyes – will make it possible for the Spirit to arrive and the Spirit will bring new ministries, new ways of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, of spreading the Gospel message that God wants all the world to hear.

A locally limited Jesus, a Jesus embodied in human skin and located in a specific geographical place, a Jesus you could see and hear and touch and find with a map reference, would not be able to reach as widely as God wanted. The message of the Gospel would spread only at the speed of the fastest horse and reach only those who were there to hear it. But the Holy Spirit, living and working in the lives of men and women across the globe, would mean that God's activity could be seen and experienced infinitely more widely. Jesus is off to pass on the baton in the relay of God's unfolding plans for humanity, to pass it on to the Holy Spirit. Through the door through which Jesus exits, the Holy Spirit will make his entrance. And, Jesus goes on to explain, this Spirit will come with ministries in three particular directions: ministries to the world, to the disciples and to Jesus himself.

**1. TO THE WORLD (vv8-11)**

In vv8-11, Jesus tells the disciples what effect the Holy Spirit will have on the world. As I'm sure some of you know, there's a lot of debate about what exactly these words mean here and how we should understand them in English. Some of you may have different versions of the Bible this morning and what you have in your version may include subtle differences from the NIV, from which we've just read. We could spend most of our time this morning looking at the different translations and their implications, parsing the Greek and debating the English. It might be interesting for some of you, but that's usually only an excuse for not getting on and doing what it says, so you can discuss that amongst yourselves and consult the various commentaries that have been written. [The way I'm going to read these verses this morning is a synthesis of the ideas put forward in their commentaries by Don Carson, F F Bruce and George Beasley-Murray. (I just mention that so you know I've done a bit of work for this sermon!)]

The Holy Spirit is going to expose the thinking, the attitudes of the world for what they are. He will eventually bring the world to the realisation of its own folly – in the sense of a conscience – and also reveal to the disciples what are the problems that need to be confronted. The things that we take so much

for granted will be shown up as false and sinful and therefore enable something to be done about them. There are three things in particular that Jesus mentions here.

Firstly, the Holy Spirit will **expose the sin** of the world. It is through the Holy Spirit's work that people will see that their lives are out of line with what God expects and wills. This is both exemplified by and caused by unbelief. People do not believe in God, so they see no need to take anything that he says seriously. And their behaviour and attitudes demonstrate quite clearly that they have no time for God, no room for him in their lives and they have effectively dismissed any thought of him from their minds. Although many people would maintain that they do believe in God, the Holy Spirit makes it obvious that they do not. It means that the disciples of Jesus – which now includes you and me – will have the discernment necessary to see those who really need to have their belief in God kindled or re-kindled. And it can mean that those who have tried to live without God find their lives transformed as the Spirit works within them – sometimes as a result of people speaking to them about Jesus, sometimes seemingly without any human intervention as their consciences are pricked and they seek out God for themselves.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit will **expose the righteousness of the world for what it is**. Up to this point Jesus has been doing that as he has pricked the bubble of pomposity and religiosity of the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, as he has exposed the hypocrisy of those who claimed to be righteous but were not. The world is full of false righteousness, of men and women who consider themselves to be following a morality and treading a path of ethical behaviour that is, in fact, quite at odds with the path laid down by God in his word. It is a false righteousness in which so-called human rights trump faith, in which love trumps truth, in which dogma trumps grace. We see it all around us, within and without the church. It manifests itself when people start to draw up the rules themselves or, more often, take the rules that God has given us, the laws of his Kingdom, and gradually change them until they look nothing like they originally did. It's really self-righteousness.

Of course, such righteousness always starts off in the right place. Human rights, love, doctrine are all very clearly evident in God's word. But imperceptibly we see things change so that human rights, rather than being a form of protection for those who are most vulnerable (as we see in, for example, *Leviticus*) becomes a means of the rich and influential protecting themselves against anything that might affect their own very personal interests. Love, at the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and expressed in such amazing ways in *1 Corinthians 13*, becomes little more than a sentimental expression of tolerance and is divorced completely from any sense of responsibility or consequence, a feel-good idea that we'll all get there (wherever "there" might be) in the end and it doesn't really matter how we respond to God. In churches particularly, dogma and doctrine, those means we have of ensuring that our faith in God is kept focussed and biblically based, become simply sticks to beat those with whom we do not agree, without any idea of God's overwhelming grace and mercy. It's a false righteousness and as Jesus goes to the Father it will be the Holy Spirit who will continue to expose it.

And thirdly, the Holy Spirit will **expose the poor judgement of the world**. "*The prince of this world now stands condemned*", says Jesus. The world has completely the wrong ideas about what's going on and about their own eventual judgement. And they've demonstrated this in their poor choice of which side to back. They have shown flawed judgement in following the prince of this world – the Devil, the forces of evil, Satan, however you want to describe it – because he was already condemned by God and has now been decisively defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus. People may protest that it doesn't look very much as if evil has been defeated, but when this Kingdom reaches its fulfilment, you'll see that's true. The battle has been won and we are now experiencing the last frustrated thrashing about of the losers. As we were saying last Sunday evening, it's a bit like the analogy of a league table in which one team has amassed so many points by February that they know they'll be champions in May – no-one can possibly catch them up, but they still have to play out the rest of the season. We are now living in that time between Jesus ensuring that he will win the league and the end of the season. There's no doubt who will be crowned champion when he returns, so it shows very poor judgement indeed if you back the others side to win – there's no chance of that happening. And the Holy Spirit exposes that poor judgement.

## 2. TO THE DISCIPLES (vv12,13)

But this same Holy Spirit has a ministry to the disciples, to the followers of Jesus as well. He will “*guide you into all truth*” says Jesus. The Spirit will continue to teach the disciples because Jesus has more to teach them but has run out of time. It was impossible for Jesus to teach his followers everything in the short time he was with them on earth. John himself points to that in 20:30 and 21:25. Jesus has told them so much, but there is more to be revealed, so much truth to be gleaned from what he has already said, so much of his teaching to be “unpacked”. It was also pretty difficult for Jesus to tell the disciples everything he wanted to because their understanding was limited. Just think of the things he said that they couldn’t have understood which we can now see with the benefit of hindsight – stuff about his death and resurrection which just wouldn’t have made sense to them, but which seems as clear as day to us because we now know the whole story (or, at least, more of the story than they did). There’s a little hint of that in the things Luke tells us about how Jesus opened the Scriptures to the two people on the road to Emmaus on Easter Sunday evening, showing them how what they had just experienced fitted into God’s plan for the redemption of creation and the salvation of humanity. And later that same evening, Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures. But he was going away, and the Holy Spirit would continue that work in their lives, in their minds.

What he is not saying is that there will be additional truth, things to add to his teaching, things which are different from what Jesus has already said. John Calvin, in his commentary on these verses, points to the errors (as he sees them) of “*the Papists and the Mohammedans*” who have added church tradition and the Q’ran respectively to the revelation of Jesus and given them equal or greater status. We might add the teachings of Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses and, indeed, some of the wackier fringes of the Christian Church. The Spirit does not give new revelation about Jesus, but rather helps us to appreciate the further unfolding of Jesus’ existing *kerygma* through preaching, teaching, the Spirit’s insight and inspiration, and the spiritual gifts of knowledge and wisdom. It’s the Holy Spirit who inspires those who preach and expound, who write and teach, who offer new ways of looking at eternal truths, who have just the right word for the moment when people need it.

Based on what we have written in this book, the Bible, the words of Moses and David, of the Hebrew Prophets and gospel writers, of Jesus himself and Paul and Peter and James and John, the Spirit enables us to dig deeper into these things and discover the truth that is already hidden there. He “*will speak only what he hears*”: even the Spirit doesn’t bring anything new in the sense of as yet unheard of. I remember one of my theological college lecturers saying that if you think you’ve discovered something about the Gospel that is completely new after two thousand years of prayer and scholarship, you maybe ought to think again! The Spirit simply leads us further into the things that God has already spoken. That was happening by the time John wrote these words – Jesus had spoken them, John reported them, but Paul and Peter were already interpreting them and applying them, and sharing that with the Christians to whom they wrote letters and the as yet unbelievers to whom they preached. Many of you here this morning will have had those moments of enlightenment as you read a passage of Scripture and the Holy Spirit enables you to see something in it or to understand something from it that you’ve never spotted before. That’s the Spirit of truth, guiding you into all truth – a path that we will never fully exhaust, because there is always so much more.

## 3. TO JESUS (vv14,15)

And finally the Holy Spirit will exercise a ministry with regard to Jesus himself. We are told here that he will bring glory to Jesus. He will “*take what is mine and make it known to you.*” The Holy Spirit grants us greater and greater insight into who Jesus is and what he does. He inspires us in our relationship with him, in our knowledge of him. He opens our eyes to the radiance and the power and the awesome majesty of Jesus – to his glory. He helps us to focus on Jesus and see the fullness of that glory. Jesus is no longer with us physically – and even when he was a physical presence in Palestine very few people were privileged to see his glory, only really Peter, James and John when he was transfigured on the mountain.

But the Holy Spirit now gives us glimpses of Jesus' glory and motivates us in our worship of him. The more we discover about Jesus, the deeper grows our relationship with him – just as in any relationship – and the deeper grows our worship. That has a spin off, too, in our appreciation of the Holy Trinity. There's no developed doctrine of the Holy Trinity on the New Testament, no explanation of it or codifying of it, but there are little insights into the dynamic at its heart as we get here – Father, Son and Holy Spirit with their distinct roles and person, but their inseparable unity and oneness.

We said earlier that the presence of the Holy Spirit is a marker of the Kingdom of God, a sign of God's reign and rule in this world, a foretaste of that eternal kingdom which we all shall share. And we can now see the three elements that make up the life of that kingdom, pointing off in different directions. In the direction of the world there is the element of preaching, proclamation, evangelism – confronting the world with the claims of Jesus Christ, with the reality of sin, of true righteousness demonstrated in the grace and mercy of God, and of the folly of making the wrong judgement about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of men and women and through the proclamation of his followers. The late Donald English, a great preacher and evangelist, once defined evangelism as “*Seeing where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining him in it.*” A feature of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Kingdom of God is that Christ's followers are proclaiming the gospel by their words and by their lives.

In the direction of the disciples, of the followers of Jesus, there is the element of teaching. Where God's Kingdom is being built Christians are being built up. They are studying the Bible for themselves with the help of the Holy Spirit's insight, through scholars and writers and those who help us to understand, as well as by those special insights that he sometimes grants us as we read. They are listening to those who have themselves studied and dug deep into the Word of God and who share the fruit of that in their preaching and teaching, having been helped by the Holy Spirit as they prepared and as they deliver the fruits of that study and preparation. And as that teaching is put into practice, as those things which the Holy Spirit shows us in God's word are lived out in our lives, then the justice and righteousness that are of God begin to be apparent in our communities.

And in the direction of Jesus, there is the element of worship. As the Holy Spirit shows us more of Jesus and more of his love and grace and majesty, then we are drawn into worship – we have no option. The character and beauty and work of Jesus force us to our knees in thanksgiving and praise and prayer. Where the Kingdom of God is being built, there is authentic, Christ-centred, Spirit-inspired worship. That worship can both build up believers and draw in those who as yet do not believe.

All this, then, is by way of reassuring the disciples of Jesus who are going to need to get used to facing opposition and confronting evil without the physical presence of Jesus beside them, disciples who need encouragement when it seems as if evil is gaining the upper hand and people want nothing to do with the gospel. Jesus, in a sense, lives on through the presence and activity of his Holy Spirit. And, as always, that makes all the difference to us.

*Questions for discussion on the next page*

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- a) **The Holy Spirit will expose the sin of the world.** It is through the Holy Spirit's work that people will see that their lives are out of line with what God expects and wills. This is both exemplified by and caused by unbelief.
- b) **The Holy Spirit will expose the "righteousness" of the world for what it is.** Up to this point Jesus has been doing that. The world is full of false righteousness, which manifests itself when people start to draw up the rules themselves or, more often, take the rules that God has given us, the laws of his Kingdom, and gradually change them until they look nothing like they originally did.
- c) **The Holy Spirit will expose the poor judgement of the world.** "*The prince of this world now stands condemned*", says Jesus. The world has demonstrated their poor choice of which side to back. They have shown flawed judgement in following the prince of this world.

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He will "*guide you into all truth*" says Jesus. The Spirit will continue to teach the disciples because Jesus has more to teach them but has run out of time. (See *John 20:30* and *21:25*.) The Spirit enables us to dig deeper into God's word and discover the truth that is already hidden there.

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The Holy Spirit is a marker of the Kingdom of God in three ways. In the direction of **the world** there is the element of preaching, proclamation, evangelism. In the direction of **the disciples** there is the element of teaching. And in the direction of **Jesus**, there is the element of worship.

**Questions for discussion**

1. Why didn't Jesus tell the disciples all this earlier in his ministry?
2. "The Holy Spirit's presence is one of the key markers of the Kingdom." What other markers of the Kingdom of God are there?
3. The NIV uses the word "Counsellor" to refer to the Holy Spirit. What do you understand by that term? What other terms could have been used?
4. In what ways does the Holy Spirit expose the wrongs of the world?
5. "*The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth.*" Do you think there is truth that is not contained in the Bible? Why/why not?
6. In what ways is this passage an encouragement to Christians?