

Sermon: He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit

Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

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During the depression in the USA in the 1930's Mr. Yates had a sheep ranch. He wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay for his mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those West Texas hills, he was greatly troubled about how he would pay his bills.

Then a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 400 meters deep they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large. In fact, 30 years after the discovery, a government test of one of the wells showed it still had the potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day. And Mr. Yates owned it all.

The day he purchased the land, he had received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, he'd been living on relief. A multimillionaire living in poverty. The problem? He didn't know the oil was there, even though he owned it.

As Christians we so often live in spiritual poverty. We have the Spirit of God in our life; we are entitled to his gifts and his energizing power, but we are not aware or we do not dig deep enough to use our birthright.

1 Creation

Today and in the weeks ahead we will focus on the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, and what this means for us; we will explore the terrain and drill, to see what the Holy Spirit means for us and what He does for us.

To begin with, the Holy Spirit was deeply involved in the creation of our world and of humankind. God created our world not as some external neutral force, but in a deeply personal manner. He personally created humankind and blew the breath of life into us.

In Genesis 1, we read that God says, 'Let us make humans'. He made you and me. But interestingly, the Hebrew text says that God speaks of himself in the plural. Let "us" make humans.

Keep in mind that the Hebrew language did not make use of the majestic plural. The queen of England can say, 'We, Elisabeth', but Hebrew did not know this grammatical construction.

So if God says, 'Let us create man', something strange is happening.

It is quite clear from the first writings of the church, that the earliest Christians believed that this Creator-God is best described as three persons in one being.

The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God - they are equally One God. But Father, Son and Spirit are at the same time separate 'persons'.

Even the first verses of the Bible seem in a mysterious way to point to God being a Trinity of beings. The idea is not something the church invented.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [...] And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light".

Here we read of God, and the Spirit of God, and the Word of God. In the New Testament this expression of God, the Word of God, is equated with the Son who came into our world as Jesus Christ. Through Him God created the world.

At the time of Creation, we also see the Spirit of God at work. In the Creation story the Spirit is presented to us as the wind, the breath of God. This Spirit of God is not only hovering over the waters in a general act of creation, but he is also blown by God into humankind as the breath of life.

This has made us beings in God's image. We have, I say this carefully, we have something divine in us. Something that separates us from the animals. The Breath of God.

The Holy Spirit was involved in creating us. In Job 33:4 we read,

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

This is why our Creed says

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

The Holy Spirit is indeed one with the Father and the Son, and he deserves the same worship and glory. He is, after all, the Lord, the giver of life - and not just some impersonal power.

In my younger years, in The Netherlands, I sometimes had major disputes with Jehovah's Witnesses when they tried to convert me. In contradiction to the whole church throughout the ages, these people deny the reality of the Trinity. For them, the Holy Spirit is "God's power in action, his active force, not a person", as their literature teaches.

I remember making one of them really angry because I insisted that the Holy Spirit is a person.

I pointed the man to Ephesians 4:30, where Paul says, 'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God', and I asked him, "Can we grieve electricity, or dynamite? Of course not. Only a person can be grieved, someone with a will, with a mind, with feelings."

I realize, we must be careful to not ascribe humanness to God, but the Spirit of God is someone who can be grieved. Beside this, the Bible says that we are to obey him and to honor him. He commands, he has a will, he teaches. He is a person.

And the Holy Scriptures also present him to us as omniscient - he knows everything. He is also omnipresent - present at the same time everywhere. He is also called eternal. These are characteristics of God alone.

2 Baptism of Jesus

At the time of creation we see waters, we see God, we see the Spirit - a Divine person.

When Jesus is baptized we see waters, we see God, we see the same Spirit.

In both cases the Spirit is actively involved in God's work. In the Genesis-story, the Spirit creates the world.

With the baptism of Jesus, God began the recreation of the world - and the Spirit is the active agent of God, for our re-creation. For our renewal. Imagine how important the Holy Spirit is for us!

We need him in our life. Without him as the breath of life, we would not live physically for a second.

And without him as the one who renews our life spiritually, how could we ever be alive to God?

When Jesus was baptized, we read that

He came up out of the water, [and] immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The heavens were torn open, so that the Holy Spirit could descend on Jesus. In Jesus, God had provided the perfect human with whom he could have full communion. Mankind in its earliest stage has messed up badly, and for many centuries Israel had prayed for renewal and for God to come back to his temple.

Now God has come to his temple. Heaven is open; the glory of God, the Holy Spirit, comes to Jesus Christ. He is the perfect house for God to live in. This is what the world has been waiting for.

Jesus is called the Christ, the anointed one. Anointing in the Old Testament was always a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God resting on someone; this was symbolized by oil that was poured on someone.

If ever the Spirit rested on someone, it was on Jesus. He was truly anointed. Not only because the Holy Spirit empowered him for his ministry, but also because he was one with the Holy Spirit in the life of the Trinity.

In the Eastern churches, throughout the centuries, on the evening of 6 January when the story of Jesus' baptism is read, a special hymn has been sung. It is called the *Troparion*:

When You, O Lord were baptized in the Jordan
the worship of the Trinity was made manifest
for the voice of the Father bore witness to You
And called You His beloved Son.
And the Spirit, in the form of a dove,
confirmed the truthfulness of His word.

At the baptism of Jesus we see the Spirit act together with the Father and with the Son. The Father speaks from heaven; The Son is baptized for ministry on earth; the Spirit comes to strengthen the Son for his ministry.

If Jesus needed the power of the Spirit to live a life for God, how much more do we need the presence and the work of the Spirit in our lives.

3 Baptism in the Spirit

But that is exactly the promise to us – given at the time of the baptism of Jesus. When John the Baptist wants to express how much mightier Jesus is than he is, he points to the fact that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

The power of Jesus is clear; he is able, as a participant in the Holy Trinity, to send the Spirit to this world, to be with us. And he has done this on the first day of Pentecost.

This is the most beautiful aspect of the Christian life, the capstone of God's blessings to us. This Spirit is promised to all those who follow Jesus Christ. This is the most fantastic promise.

The Spirit who created this world, the Spirit who has made us into living beings, the Spirit who empowered Jesus to live a life for God, this Spirit is also given to us. Jesus showers this Spirit on us. He floods us with this Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God is with us, in us, around us, through Jesus Christ. He has made us alive before God; He renews our life; He drives us to live for God. This is God enabling us to live for Him.

And the presence of the Spirit in your life makes you also part of the community of God himself. Part of the intimacy that exists in God. That Jesus baptizes us in the Holy Spirit means nothing less than that we become participants in the eternal love-feast of the Triune God.

One day we will live in full unity with our Lord and God, but even today, with his Spirit He is present in our life and He offers us communion with Him – an aspect of the Christian life that we celebrate in our weekly worship services.

When Jesus was baptized, 'heaven was torn open' as if it was a curtain, and the Spirit came to him. These words 'heaven was torn open' remind me of what happened in the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified.

At the very hour of His death, the curtain of the Holy of Holies, that symbolized heaven in the temple, was torn open from the top to the bottom. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ had opened the way, and God could be with the people.

Conclusion

Because of his life and death and resurrection, heaven was opened for us - and Jesus could send his Spirit from heaven to those who follow him.

The power and support that Jesus received from the Father, enabling Him to live a life pleasing to God, has also been given to you and me.

God has given you enormous spiritual reserves - they come with faith in Jesus Christ and belonging to his Church.

In the weeks ahead we will look deeper into this treasure buried in our land. And God challenges us to dig for those reserves. You may often feel weak or spiritually poor, but have you actually started digging?

Amen