

**We Believe: God In You, the Hope of Glory**

Romans 8:10-11, 15-16, 26-27, John 14:15-21, 25-27

Good Morning! Well, this continues to be the strangest, most disorienting month I've ever known. I wasn't expecting the earth to start shaking on Wednesday. We've been debating what kind of disaster is next! I'm happy that a thorough inspection by structural engineers shows that our building is ok---only cosmetic damage. Meanwhile, we all are settling into social distancing and staying home. As we do that, we're all experiencing different versions of separation and of togetherness. The separation is pretty hard on everyone. For some the new togetherness with family or roommates is a blessing. For others it is too much at times. For people living alone, the emptiness of separation can be overwhelming. How are you doing? Please don't hesitate to reach out to Pastor Chris or to me—we are here for you. Our deacons and some friends have tried to call every single member of our congregation each of the past two weeks. We hope to continue to check in with each other. That is part of what it means to be one Body together. If you haven't gotten a call, maybe we don't have the right number for you, so feel free to let the office know how to reach you.

I saw this online (**slide up**)— “Looking at the map for some weekend travel plans” ---and it is a blueprint of their apartment! In the comments people were suggesting “pack your bags for a trip to the balcony!” I saw another version of this map about taking a wine tour—a glass in the kitchen, one in the bathroom . . . Seriously though, I love how people are figuring out ways to connect even across distance. Our niece posted about a party Friday night. She said: “Tonight some friends of ours set up a virtual night out where we all shared drinks and stories via Zoom, and it was lovely. After COVID-19 I hope we can all remember that there was once a time when we didn't require our friends to wear pants to be friends with them.” (**slide down**) Just to be clear, I encourage pants for worship. Yesterday our daughter had a bridal shower on Zoom! Gracie and her friends all dressed up and gathered together online to celebrate.

Amazing. We can connect and be together even without being in the same room. Many of our groups here at First Pres are starting to meet online for now—like our adult Sunday School, the youth Sunday School, the Tuesday morning men’s breakfast, and the Wednesday prayer group. We moved our Tuesday evening prayer and praise to Facebook Live so you all can join in. Look at the Covid 19 update page on our website to get information about how to connect with any of our groups.

This problem of being separated and together is not new. In fact, today’s topic is really about how God’s radical solution to our problem of being separated from him. We are in a sermon series on what Christians believe. It is kind of a whirlwind tour guided by the Apostles’ Creed—that ancient summary of our faith that really all Christians in all times and places have agreed upon. Last week we talked about Jesus—the son of God, our rescuer. Some of you may be thinking “Where is Jesus now?” Jesus went to be with the Father—body and all. How can he be with us here **and** be with the Father?

The answer is our topic today—The Holy Spirit. God is with us by his Spirit. The Spirit is what connects us to Jesus. God’s Spirit is what connects us even when we are apart. That is exactly what Jesus was talking about in our reading from John’s Gospel today. Jesus says he will ask the Father and the Father will send *another* advocate—the Holy Spirit-- to help us and be with us forever. A little bit later Jesus tells the disciples that it is good that he is going away, *because* when he goes he can send the Holy Spirit to us.

That idea that God’s Spirit connects us to Jesus is the most important thing to remember from today. God is with us by his Spirit. Jesus is with us by his Spirit. We are going to focus on the Reality of the Spirit, the Resources the Spirit gives us, and the Results of the Spirit’s presence with us. Reality, Resources and Results.

Most of us have some trouble with the word Spirit. Author Frederick Buechner says that “the word spirit has come to mean something pale and shapeless. Like an unmade bed.” It doesn’t help that in old English people used the word Ghost. That is a profoundly mistaken view of the Holy Spirit. The word for Spirit in both Hebrew and Greek also means wind and breath. God breathed into the first people to give them life. Spirit means breath and breath

means life. God's Spirit is the source of life—he is breathing life into his creation right now! The Spirit is NOT a pale, vague force, the Spirit is a powerful person, the source of all life!

The Spirit is real. Jesus promised that he'd send us the Spirit and we can trust him on that. The Bible has lots of examples of the Spirit arriving in powerful ways—think about the Pentecost story. Jesus promised that his disciples would receive “power from on high” and one day there they were with tongues of fire dancing on people's heads—the Spirit is contagious! But you don't have to rely only on the Bible—you've experienced the Spirit yourself. Anytime you have felt God show up in your life; that is the Holy Spirit at work. That internal nudge to call someone and when you do it was just the right time? That surprising feeling of protection and love just when you need it? That's the Holy Spirit. Just this week one of our congregation was in a terrifying car crash. A car swerved in front of him and forced his car into a barrier, totaling his car. The pictures are horrible. He said that as he sat in his car with the air bags deployed, he felt peace. Calm. Protection. He felt goodness, hope and peace. Incredibly, he was able to walk away. He was whole and at peace thanks to the presence of God's Holy Spirit. Church, the Spirit is real.

The Spirit gives believers amazing resources to live life—especially when life is disrupted like it is today. Everyone listening to this service has the gift of life—the breath of God. Our Romans reading reminds us that the Spirit also gives us *new* life—resurrection life. Paul says that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living in us! And that Spirit frees us, it doesn't make us slaves. It doesn't leave us to live in fear. God's Spirit delivers us from Fear! Hallelujah! He does not bring us a spirit of slavery and fear, but of adoption—the Spirit raises us to new life and welcomes us as children of God! Because the Spirit connects us to Jesus, we can call God Abba-- Daddy. The Message translation puts it like this: “This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike, “What's next, Poppa?” God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are.” --- This Spirit connects us to Jesus—even and especially when we feel alone.

The Spirit also is our helper. Jesus said he would send another Advocate to help us and be us forever, the Spirit of Truth. Advocate translates the Greek word Paraclytos or Paraclete. It is a word with a rich range of meaning. It can also be translated as helper and comforter and

counselor. Literally it means “one who comes alongside.” Someone who is called to come and be with you. To help you, to comfort you, to encourage you, to guide you through unfamiliar territory. In Romans Paul writes that the Spirit helps us even in our weakness. Does that sound useful at all to you right now? God’s Spirit even helps us pray! He intercedes for us through groans too deep for words! Even when we don’t know how to pray or what to pray, the Spirit prays for us!

God solves the separate and together problem by sending his Spirit to be with us, to come alongside us, and to help us. Friends, you truly are not alone—call out to Jesus to send you his Spirit! He is not far away. Jesus promises that he will live with us and will be *in* us. Jesus said the Spirit will abide with us. We abide in him and he abides in us. Abiding is a very intimate, mutual relationship. THAT is how close God’s Spirit—the Paraclete—is to you. He is moving in you and you are empowered by Him. You are not alone.

Jesus promised the Spirit to all of his followers. And incredibly, he sends us out to be that helper for people around us. We are called to be the ones who come alongside our neighbors right now. To be helpers and comforters and advocates for them. We often say that the church—all of us-- are called to be Jesus’ hands and feet in the world. It is just as accurate to say that we are sent to be God’s Spirit, his Paraclete, in the world. Just as the Spirit connects us with God, we are called to connect with others. Even during times of social distancing, we can be the ones who come alongside and offer help or comfort or encouragement. To be advocates.

Our legislative session just ended, and I was talking with our Elder Pamela Atkinson. As many of you know, she spends many, many hours with government officials advocating for people experiencing homelessness. She is a voice for people who don’t have a voice. Pamela’s advocacy really made a difference, again. But she isn’t the only advocate—ALL of us are called to be that kind of helper too. Not necessarily at the legislature, but right where you are now. What neighbors do you have who need a comforter or a helper today? Who do you need to come alongside and advocate for?

The Spirit doesn’t just give us a job, He equips us for it! The Spirit gives us gifts, all kinds of spiritual gifts for the common good. The point of those gifts is to build up Christ’s Body, the

Church so we can live out Jesus' Rescue Mission in the world. I have seen that variety of gifts at work in so many ways in the last few weeks. People with technical expertise giving their time and creativity so we can get online. Deacons and others spending time connecting with people on the phone. Roger Durst helping us check the building's safety. The youth meeting together 4 times last week by Zoom! As a group, God gifts us with *everything* we need. And as a group we will get through even this crazy time, with God's help! Can I get an Amen?!

The Spirit gives us Truth as well. Jesus called him the Spirit of Truth. And he said that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things and remind us of everything Jesus taught. We believe that the Bible was inspired—that literally means breathed out—by God's Spirit. He inspired the original authors; he spoke through the prophets. And the Spirit is always acting—he protected the Bible through the centuries, and he works in us today so we can understand his message even right now. The Spirit enlightens our minds so we can connect with God through the Bible.

Friends, the Spirit is *real*. As we trust Jesus, He abides with us and in us, and the Spirit gives us *resources* to live out our part of Jesus' rescue mission.

Finally, what is the *result* of the Spirit's life with us? Jesus ended his introduction of the Spirit with a promise—a promise of peace. Not as the world gives, but a peace that protects our hearts and keeps us from fear. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." We need to hear those words today—they are just as true now as when Jesus first said them. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." They are true because the one who brings that peace is the same today—God's Holy Spirit, his enlivening breath is moving in you right now. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Listen to these words from just after today's reading in Romans: "We know that God works all things together for the good of those who love him." "If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither

height nor depth, nor ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Amen? Hallelujah! Because God’s Spirit is with us, we can have peace and we can trust and can rest in God’s love. We can rest assured always, no matter what. We are held by God’s Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love. Friends, you know that the Bible is the story of how God never gives up, of how Jesus came and rescued us, even at the cost of his own life. God overcame our separation from him and sends His Spirit to abide with us. Because of that we can live secure in his love and peace. Now and always.

Let’s pray: Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you for saving us and thank you for sending us your Spirit. Holy Spirit, you are welcome here. You are welcome in our lives, in our hearts, in our minds. Help us to abide in you as you abide in us and empower us to faithfully live out our part in your Rescue Mission even right now in these scary, unsettled times. Come along side us, great comforter, amazing helper—and give us hope and faith and courage to live for you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.