

First Presbyterian Church of Santa Fe

Adult Education Class on July 25, 2021

Presenter: Allen Gullledge

The title for today's "Summer Bible School" is "The Holy Spirit, the Neglected Part of the Trinity." Sounds like I've chopped off more than I can chew.

This is the last of our three weeks together that started with putting together the latest Gallup polls suggesting that, for the first time, fewer than half of Americans were willing to claim membership in a church, synagogue, or mosque (organized religion) with the opinion—as this relates to the Christian Church—that maybe the Reformation is running out of gas. The battle call of "Sola Scriptura, Scriptura Sola" has had a bad run over the last 100 years, if not longer. Science and technology have rendered many of the Bibles' stories regarding creation and historical events into question, as well as the ongoing social issues that churches have to twist scripture that never spoke of homosexuality, gay marriage, gay rights, women's rights, abortions, etc., to speak to these complex issues.

The Bible is an Ancient Document and can never stop being an ancient text.

Last week, we focused on the Bible's telling of the concept of Creation and of Original Sin in Genesis 3, and how all mainline theology and doctrines have centered around sin, redemption, the need for a Savior, forgiveness, spiritual re-birth, etc.

I brought up the idea that like the writers of scripture, who wrote of a world from the viewpoint of people at a particular time and place in time/space history making them biased, understand that when we read scripture, we are guilty of reading it through the prism of our life experiences in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. We are biased as well. (Capitalism)

So, this week I thought we could look at the Holy Spirit, one-third of the Trinity that is the foundation of our faith but which is the most difficult part of the Trinity to describe and understand and which, in many cases, seems to be the polar opposite of Scripture, only Scripture, the inerrant Word of God.

Some examples and thoughts come from *The Age of the Spirit* by Phyllis Tickle, founding editor of the Religious Department at *Publishers Weekly*, author of more than two dozen books, honorary degrees the Berkeley School of Divinity at Yale and North Park University.

Philosopher and theologian Robin Meyers captures both the conundrum and its causes when he contends that, "The real problem is that the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled by the pen of any theologian."

“It is not always fidelity to creeds or doctrines that causes concern. Rather, it is about the appropriate chain of command. Who is really in charge?”

“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1-2 NKJV).

Jesus is telling Nicodemus that unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God; Jesus immediately makes His point less understandable by citing the wind that the Spirit is like, blowing where it wishes, yet none can tell where it comes from or goes to (John 3:5-8).

At Jesus’ baptism, Mark tells us that the Spirit descends on him like a dove and that it is the Voice that proclaims him as the well-beloved Son in whom Y-H-W-H finds delight (Mark 1:9-12).

Luke uses the same word in his telling of the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

You want more complexity? Jesus’ own words of “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NIV). Yet Paul wrote his “one body, one Spirit, One Lord” words also fully cognizant of the Great Commission.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

If we are honest, in other words, then we must admit to ourselves and to everybody else that there is no aspect of creedal Christianity that makes more Christians uneasy today than does the whole area of the existence, reality, and workings of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. Unless you’re Pentecostal and they luxuriate in talking about the Holy Spirit.

According to St. Augustine, one of Christianity’s earliest and greatest theologians (who lived in the late 300s, early 400s CE), “Every measure of Christian progress comes through a spiritual and reasoned understanding of the Trinity.”

And yet most of us are uncomfortable with mysticism, meditation, and the thought of being alone and quiet—Contemplation.

In John’s Gospel, Chapter 14, verses 25-26, Jesus says, “I have told you all these things while I am with you, but the Counselor, Advocate will teach you everything and will cause you to remember all that I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name.”

Jesus’ last words in Luke’s Gospel are, “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my father promised. [TRINITY]. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

Before I throw it open to questions and discussion, I wanted to read you one more Phyllis Tickle quote, this one from an earlier book: *The Great Emergence, How Christianity is Changing and Why*.

“The duty, the challenge, the joy and excitement of the Church and for the Christians who compose her, then, is in discovering what it means to believe that the kingdom of God is within one and in understanding that one is thereby a pulsating, vibrating bit in a much grander network. Neither established human authority nor scholarly or priestly discernment alone can lead; because, being human, both are trapped in space/time and thereby prevented from a perspective of total understanding. Rather, it is how the message runs back and forth, over and about, the hubs of the network that it is tried and amended and tempered into wisdom and right action for effecting the Father’s will.”