

## 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2024 – The Trinity (1): The Witnessing Spirit (John 15:26-16:15)

Here's a question to kick off with: who is the wisest person you know? Take a moment to reflect on that – you might have come up with a range of answers: from parents, to best friends, to various teachers you've known over the years. And the reasons might have varied too: perhaps it was the wisdom of their life experience, perhaps they always knew just what to say in any given situation, perhaps they had simple mottos which they passed on to you.

Well, there's obviously a Right Answer to this question, and in saying it I'm going to sound like the classic Sunday School story, where the leader asks the child to identify an animal with a big fluffy tail and two small front paws clasped around a nut, and the child replies: 'Well, it sure looks like a squirrel but I know the answer has to be Jesus!' And yes, the Right Answer to who the wisest person you know is, of course, Jesus – the Word made flesh, the Wisdom of our Almighty Creator walking this earth in human form.

But even as we give thanks for the great wisdom of Christ, it begs another question: **how do we mine this wisdom for all its worth?** How do we turn it from head knowledge to heart knowledge, from wonderful ideas and instructions to lived experience, to fruitful, empowered lives?

Today's passage gives us the answer. We need the Holy Spirit. Today, we begin a short series on the Trinity, and what I want to stress at the start is that what we are talking about here is *one* God – the same Lord. But we worship a Lord with three natures, not just because God has to be complicated, but because these three natures give us a rich, three-dimensional view of God. So, in the following weeks we'll think about the Son and the Father – but today we think about the Spirit.

And the first and most important thing we learn is hidden away in verse 14 – you might miss it on first reading, but it's the heart of the matter: **the Spirit's purpose is to glorify Jesus.** As v14 says: 'He will glorify me, because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.'

We can describe the work of the Spirit in lots of ways, but it all comes down to this: the Spirit's purpose is to glorify Jesus. That's how the Trinity works – all the natures of God bound together, as one, giving glory to the others. The word glory literally means 'weight', which became shorthand for the manifest presence of something, particularly of God – so **the Spirit is there to make Jesus real: in the world and to the world.**

So the Spirit, is, if you like, a witness. Jesus uses that word at the start of our passage: (v26) 'he will testify about me.' The word for witness in the Greek is *marturion*, from which we get the word 'martyr'. A martyr is ultimately a witness to something – and it's a healthy but sobering reminder that witnessing to Jesus can be a dangerous business. You only have to read the stories from organisations like Open Doors or Barnabas Aid to know what our sisters and brothers around the world have to face. And Jesus admits this quite openly to his friends: (v2) 'the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.'

But let's dig a bit deeper into how the Spirit will bear witness to Jesus and glorify him. Let's think first about how he will do that with people who are already followers of Jesus. This is what Jesus says in vv12-13: 'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.' This is a wonderful promise! **Jesus doesn't just leave us on our own, desperately trying to fathom out our faith. The Holy Spirit is there to guide us into all the truth.**

We need to add an important caveat here: the Spirit of God never contradicts the word of God. It's the Spirit of truth, and He speaks primarily through opening our minds and hearts to scripture.

That's why it's always good to pray whenever we open the bible, asking the Spirit to speak to us – because we want to take Jesus at his word, to trust him when he says in this text that the Spirit will guide us into all the truth. If you take one little tip away from today, it's to remember to pray a short prayer every time you read the bible, asking for help – you'll be amazed how much more you get out of reading the bible when you do that. The Spirit will be guiding you into all the truth.

So that's how the Spirit testifies about Jesus to us. But what about everyone else? Here we need to resurrect an old word which has sadly fallen out of use, but which gets to the heart of why we need the Spirit to be at work today: and that's the word 'conviction'. The modern version of the NIV translates this as 'prove the world to be in the wrong' – and that is a good approximation, but what it misses is the sense of *power* that Jesus is trying to convey. When he says in v8 that the Spirit will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgement, he is talking about something that has the power to open our eyes and touch our hearts. It's that lightbulb moment, when we suddenly realise that this message is for *me*, that God is speaking to *me*.

That is what we mean by conviction in a biblical sense, and most of us have experienced it – this is not just for 'other people'. But we can see its effects most clearly when we first understand the message of the gospel, of what Jesus came to do, and why – and it's interesting isn't it, that Jesus insists that **in order to really understand his message we first have to realise some deep, powerful, difficult things about sin, righteousness and judgement**. Because the reality is that if there's no sin, there's no grace – we have to understand and accept our predicament in order to cry out with hope and gratitude for our Saviour.

So, the Spirit, as Jesus says, reveals our sinfulness to us – in other words a deep acknowledgement of our selfish desires and behaviour. He also reveals God's righteousness – in other words we look at Jesus and can see how far we've fallen short of what we were meant to be. And then we also carry that sense that we *all* deserve judgment for it. That our sin matters, that judgement is not just for other people worse than me.

Maybe you can remember times when you've listened to a message and suddenly it's like that person is speaking directly to you. When they talk about Jesus dying for us, we suddenly think – yes, Jesus did that for me. Suddenly what seemed like abstract propositions are completely personal. Often when that happens, someone says – why didn't I see it before? Why have I heard this again and again and it's like it was for someone else? And the scales fall from our eyes and we know that God loves us and we give ourselves to God.

That, my friends, is what it is to be convicted by the Spirit of God. That is what Jesus means when he says that the Spirit will guide us into all truth – in other words, Jesus will be real to us. It's no longer just head knowledge, it's *here, in our hearts*, it's what we live our lives by.

**And we still need the conviction of the Holy Spirit as much as ever to change a person's heart** – in fact probably more so, since we live in a sceptical age. We might share these truths with fewer people and in more intimate settings, but we need the power of God by His Holy Spirit as much as we ever did, to dwell in what we share and what we believe.

So as I close, one last reflection – if you have people in your life you'd love to share your faith with, and so far it's never really worked, can I encourage you to pray that God's Spirit would speak to them, beyond your human words? Dare I say it, to pray that the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, would convict them of sin and righteousness and judgement, in other words of their deep need for him?

After all, it's what the Lord has done for each of us – let's seize faith that he can do it for others whom we love. We're not on our own here: the Spirit witnesses on our behalf, to glorify Jesus. Let's take Jesus at his word and pray, with renewed hope and faith: Amen, come Holy Spirit!