

On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand
The Holy Spirit: God's Intimacy with You
Psalm 139:1-13 John 14:15-27
February 21, 2018 Pastor Roger Barkley

A few years ago, Alex Zharov found himself shipwrecked on Ruffle Island.

Actually, Ruffle Island is in Jamaica Bay, only 20-minutes off the coast of Brooklyn, which made his predicament all that more frustrating.

He and two friends had intended to only spend an hour or two boating around the bay, so they sailed off with no food or water.

They may not have had water, but he and his friends had plenty of booze which led to a series of really bad decisions.

First, Alex dropped his phone in the water, then they crashed their boat onto one of the little islands in Jamaica Bay.

Then, Alex tried to swim to shore through the cold water, but instead ended-up on this second island all alone.

Dripping wet, he spent the night there with the New York skyline feeling so close that he could almost hear the city noise.

He knew that millions of people were just 20-minutes away – but he was isolated on this 147-acres of rock and sand.

Eventually he was rescued by an NYPD helicopter, but this incident got me thinking about feeling isolated or abandoned in the midst of people and activities all around us.

Maybe you feel like you don't fit in, or that you can't measure up, or that people wouldn't accept you if they really knew you.

Maybe you are so absorbed in health, financial or relationship issues that you've disconnected from others.

Well, the good news is that we are never alone because God is intimately close through the presence of the Spirit.

Remember an intimate time when you were so close to someone that you shared their breath.

That is how close the Holy Spirit is to you.

God's breath is life.

Genesis 2:7 Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

We know God, the Father – the transcendent aspect of God who reigns over and above us.

We know God, the Son – the way God put on human flesh to live among us.

And the Holy Spirit is the most intimate relationship of all, – the way God dwells all around and within us.

Psalm 139:7-12 Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there,

Surely the darkness will hide me

and the light become night around me,

even the darkness will not be dark to you;..

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

God reaches into people through the Holy Spirit,
bringing comfort, strength, encouragement and truth.

Truth is like a lens through which we see the world – often very differently than the culture views it.

You've heard of a "bird's eye view" of the world, what would a "God's eye view of the world" be like?

Last week I shared about an encounter that Tony Campolo had at Princeton Seminary, when a three-year-old in crutches was healed.

Well, on another occasion he was guest preacher at an Episcopal church.

Episcopal churches are very formal and liturgical, so at the conclusion of the service he was marched with some pomp and ceremony to the back of the sanctuary by priests in their ornate robes.

While greeting the parishioners back there he spotted a gray-haired man with squinty eyes and a nasty scowl on his face, making a bee-line for the exit.

Tony says that he doesn't know what made him do this, but on impulse he left his greeting position, walked right up to the old guy and planted a big kiss on his cheek.

And then taking the man's shoulders, he looked right into his eyes and said, "Sir, I don't know why you are so angry, but I want you to know something: I love you. Jesus loves you. And if you'll give them half a chance, these people will love you, too."

Then, he turned on his heel and went back to greeting people.

He was shocked at himself, and was afraid the old guy would come over and deck him or something.

But he didn't -- although he *did* quickly exit out the other door.

Some time later, Tony ran into this same man again and he told him his story.

He said that he had just buried his wife that week, and it was the saddest week of his life.

He said she was the only person on this earth who had ever loved him, and that the pain was overwhelming.

Well, the priest who had officiated his wife's service invited him to church that Sunday . . . and even though he'd seldom been, since he'd been specifically invited, he decided to come just to please the kindly priest.

So, he said, “I went into church that day angry and believing that I would never be loved again.

“And then you stood in the pulpit telling me about how Jesus loves me but I didn’t believe it, but then you came and gave me that kiss and said I should give those strangers a chance to love me, too.

“So, I decided to give them the chance” he said, “and I’ve been attending ever since.”

That outrageous, impulsive act of Tony Campolo was the Holy Spirit at work.

Why?

Because with human eyes, we would just see a rude old man pushing through a crowd.

But for an instant, Tony Campolo saw him through different eyes.

When our eyes are opened by the Holy Spirit we see things from God’s point of view.

A follower of Jesus asks the Holy Spirit to help them see people and circumstances as Jesus sees them.

Jesus didn’t see an angry man – he saw a hurting man, and through the Holy Spirit he gave Tony Campolo that same insight for one impulsive moment that changed both of their lives

The church is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our Statement of Faith says,

“God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.”

Many of us walked through those doors feeling empty, exhausted, anxious, grieving or confused . . . and we change as we encounter God in worship, and as we are loved and encouraged by the congregation.

We are not a sanctuary for saints, we are a hospital for sinners.

That's the way the Holy Spirit works.

So, you may ask, where do I find the Holy Spirit?

It is not so much what you find, but how you perceive.

The Holy Spirit is what we perceive *with* and so determines *what* we perceive.

But let me give you a warning: The Holy Spirit can comfort and encourage, but also the Spirit can be upsetting to your comfortable life.

I have a friend who likes canaries, and whenever she feels down she listens to them sing, she talks to them, and she admires their beauty.

But when she's got other things on her mind, she drapes a big black-out blanket over the cage so that they'll go to sleep.

You cannot just put the Holy Spirit aside in a little cage at inconvenient times.

Once you unleash the Holy Spirit in your life you are never going to be the same again.

Just ask Jeremiah.

The Spirit sent the unwilling prophet to warn the people of Babylonia's impending invasion, for which he was ridiculed and rejected.

He complained to God:

Jeremiah 20: 7-8 *You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived;*

You overpowered me and prevailed.

I am ridiculed all day long;

everyone mocks me

Whenever I speak, I cry out

proclaiming violence and destruction.

God will guide you, encourage you, comfort you ... and also use you for His purposes.

In today's scripture, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure by assuring them that he will remain close through the Holy Spirit.

John 14:1, 15-17a, 26 Do not let your hearts be troubled.... And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.... But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The Greek word for Advocate here is *paraclete*, a compound word that literally translates as “to come alongside another.”

In this sense, the Paraclete can be an advocate – to come along side to defend and counsel, and comfort – to come along side to provide resilience and encouragement.

In times of grief, the Holy Spirit will comfort.

In times of confusion, the Holy Spirit will guide.

In times of illness, the Holy Spirit will heal.

In time of discouragement, the Holy Spirit will strengthen.

But the Spirit who comes along side might also prompt (a) way out of your comfort zone and into action.

You'll never be able to blame people as you have.
You'll never be able to hold a grudge as you have.
You'll never be able to ignore people's suffering as you have.

And, you may never be able to turn-off the newsfeed that is full of sexism, racism, anti-science, rape of our environment, and other injustice(s) and escape to a self-comforting, “I'm a spiritual person; I'm not into politics”.

Did you notice that in John 14 Jesus said that he's sending “another Advocate”?

That means that the Spirit looks a lot like Jesus, who celebrated with sinners and disciples alike, who comforted the woman about to be stoned, but who also confronted the self-righteous and powerful at the risk of his own life.

So, the Spirit being sent in Jesus' name comforts the agitated and agitates the comfortable.

The Spirit who gave you life, calls for something in return.

Toward the end of his life, Albert Einstein removed the portraits of two scientists -- Newton and Maxwell -- from his wall.

He replaced those with portraits of Gandhi and Schweitzer.

Einstein explained that it was time to replace the image of success with the image of service

Back in the 1950's, Clarence Jordan was guest preacher in a church in the backwoods of North Carolina – a time and place when racism was openly practiced.

When he stepped into the pulpit that morning he saw something very strange: the crowd was mixed with black and white just sitting right next to one another.

If you lived in that era, especially in the South, you know how unthinkable that was.

White people had their own churches, their own drinking fountains, their own restaurants.

So, after the service he asked the pastor, whom he viewed as no more than a hillbilly, "How did you get this way?"

"Well, we was small church with about 20 members," he said.

"The old preacher died and we couldn't find us a new one.

"So, I went to the deacons and said, 'Heck, I'll preach for you.'

"Well, I didn't know nothing about preaching, so that first Sunday I just opened my Bible, and ran my finger down the page.

"It stopped on a passage that said 'Everyone is one in Jesus Christ.'

“Well, if God said we’re all one and the same, that there’s no Greek, no Jew but just one in Christ, I just figured I could say enough things about that to fill the sermon hour.

“Afterwards, the Deacons took me to the backroom and said we don’t want to hear that kind of talk anymore.”

Jordan asked the grizzled old man, “What did you do?”

He said, “I fired them. If a deacon isn’t going to ‘deac’ they need firing. And they couldn’t fire me because they didn’t hire me.

“So, I preached them that message every week. I preached that church down to a congregation of four, including my wife and me.

Then from that moment on we wouldn’t let anyone into that church unless they loved Jesus.”

Amazed at this story, Clarence asked, “How do you tell if someone loves Jesus?”

And the old Hillbilly said, “Because they loved each other no matter who the other person is. So, we had people who just loved each other. Black, white, rich, poor. If it mattered to them, then they didn’t love Jesus.”

That evening Clarence had dinner with a church member, a PhD in English literature.

He eventually asked, “Why do you go to that church? That preacher is no Bible scholar, and he can’t open his mouth without making a grammatical error. Why would a young, sophisticated man like you go to that backwoods church?”

The young professor answered, “Sir, I go to that church because that man preaches the Gospel.”

In 2018 it is easy for us to nod in agreement.

We all shake our heads at that the evils of the segregated South.

But in 1950 it was not so plain and it wasn't so safe – especially to a man raised on a farm in North Carolina where people were lynched for such things.

But that backwoods preacher was seeing with Holy Spirit eyes.

It's dangerous, but he changed a corner of his world because of it.

Maybe God wants you to see through His eyes.

It might be someone in your own family you need to see differently . . . maybe some angry person God wants you to love back to wholeness.

Maybe Holy Spirit eyes will show you a way through your work life that is different . . . there might be opportunities that you are blind to.

Or maybe with Holy Spirit eyes God might even want you to change your little corner of the world.

But be forewarned: The Holy Spirit eyes will change you forever.