

Sermon Prep Sun 17th May 2026

‘Who is the Holy Spirit?’ Luke 24:44-53 John 16:5-15

Intro to Holy Spirit theme Services

We’re taking a small break in our sermon series on Daniel. We’re having that break because next week is Pentecost so we’re going to look at the Holy Spirit for 2 weeks.

Today’s passages are the words of Jesus after his crucifixion and resurrection, and before his ascension into heaven. He is pointing his followers towards the coming of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit would come to them at what we now call Pentecost.

We’re going to look at Pentecost next week. This week we have some time to think about Jesus’ words, and to have a deeper think about the Holy Spirit. These passages give us some clues and direction.

It’s good to spend some time considering the Holy Spirit. We are a trinitarian church. That means that in our confessions we state that we believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. 3 equal parts, 3 equal persons, who form the Godhead.

I don’t know if you’ve ever had to remember and recall the Nicene Creed, or the Apostles Creed. Both remind us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The Nicene Creed contains this line...

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

So the Holy Spirit is an equal part of the Godhead.

Yet if we're honest there is not as much teaching and clarity on the Holy Spirit as there is on Jesus. We know that Jesus came in human form, we can read His words, visit the place He was born and lived, we can imagine what clothes He wore. We can understand that He is God the Son.

We can also understand the concept of God the Father. The whole Bible refers to Yahweh, to the Lord our God, Jesus talks of Him. We pray to Him. We get it. Mostly.

But often when we talk of the Holy Spirit it can be less clear.

Growing up the HS was often referred to as the Holy Ghost. Did anyone else hear or do that? It was standard practice in lots of churches. I don't know if that conjured up some images in our mind of a ghostly presence, floating around.

Sometimes the HS is referred to or talked about as 'it'. Have you heard that? Whereas our passage speaks of the HS as spirit, and they have many attributes of a person. The three *persons* of the trinity. Sharing their divine essence. But distinct in their personhood.

So the title of today's sermon asks 'who is the Holy Spirit?'. And I've added another question onto this I'd like to explore, how do we recognise the Holy Spirit?

So what does Jesus say concerning the Holy Spirit? Let's read today's passages...

Luke 24:44-53, New International Version

⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

John 16:5-15, New International Version

⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Holy Spirit

So Jesus gave his disciples a clear steer about the HS. There are some things we can learn and understand. He told His followers to stay and to expect the visit, a visit promised by God the Father, and that they would be 'clothed from on high' (verse 49).¹

So the Holy Spirit was promised by God and sent by Jesus.

The Holy Spirit comes with authority and power. From God the Father and from Jesus. There is a relationship between the three. A shared divine authority and power.

And the Holy Spirit was going to share something with them. *They* would be clothed from on high. This isn't a teaching or learning experience, they don't need to do anything apart from wait, this is a personal clothing experience. Clothing fits us. The HS clothes us with power from on high. That sounds pretty amazing and pretty tailored.

HS is reliant upon Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. And is present during Jesus' life on earth

The passage in John also makes clear that the visit from the HS to the disciples is reliant upon the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Jesus says that he knows they are 'filled with grief' because He is going. BUT. It is for their good.

Unless he goes away, Jesus says, the HS will not come to them.

But it's important to clarify something. The HS was always there. The HS didn't appear when Jesus was resurrected or ascended.

The HS is mentioned as being present at each stage of Jesus' life. When the angel appeared to Mary. At the baptism of Jesus. During His ministry on

¹ 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (NIV)

earth. And the HS is present throughout the Old Testament, right from the beginning in Genesis.

So the HS is permanent. But there is a releasing, a sending and receiving of the HS, that comes with the ascension of Jesus. Though his followers were filled with grief. It is for their own good.

The followers did not want Jesus to leave them again. And Jesus sees and knows their grief. But he's saying this is a good thing.

Jesus' death changed the world in so many ways. Jesus died for the whole world. The whole of creation. Everyone and everything.

And one of the things that changed with his ascension, was that it in some way, it released the HS to change His people. To clothe his people. The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, upon you, upon me, individually, personally. Changing lives.

The HS is the spirit of truth

Vs 12 says that Jesus has more to say. Well I am pleased to read that. I don't know about you but I certainly have more to ask! More I want to know. I think we all have more to ask! And our passage tells us that Jesus has more to say, and he is going, he is ascending to heaven...but the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth.

So the HS can be relied upon to **guide us**. If we pray and ask for guidance we can do so in hope and expectation that we will receive it.

And there is the suggestion of a prophetic element to the HS here too. It says 'He will tell you what is yet to come'. HS will make known to you. He guides us. He can reveal things. The HS still does this.

Just this week I had a revelation, which I thought was from the HS, as to someone to speak to about the ST café, I thought it was a bit left field if I'm honest with you, but I went along with it. It became really clear really quickly just how perfect this was. Thank you Holy Spirit for guiding us.

But let us be honest. This has also been falsely claimed. I have heard of people claiming that the HS told them all sorts of things... I've heard someone claim that the HS told them to have an extra marital affair.

I don't think that can be the HS.

This is really important. The HS is the spirit of truth. I asked before how we recognise the HS. People do make claims about the HS that are not true. Designed to twist, fit an agenda, manipulate even. The HS is the spirit of truth. So if it's not true then it's not the HS.

Misusing, falsely claiming guidance from the HS, I think that's pretty serious.

The HS is the spirit of truth. The HS shares the attributes of the father and the son.

Does anyone know the fruits of the spirit?...Galatians 5:22 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.'

They're not anger, or hurt, deceit, or self-hate, violence, or pride, jealousy, shame or greed. The HS doesn't tell us to build gold statues to ourselves, or hurt other people. The HS is consistent with God the Father and God the Son.

The advocate.

Jesus seems to be saying that it is better to live after his resurrection than during his time here on earth. The Spirit continues His ministry in our times, the age of the New Covenant.

Jesus calls the HS the advocate, or sometimes it's translated as helper or comforter. What is an advocate? An advocate helps those in trouble with the law.

Perhaps this is why it's easier to live in the new covenant times, because we have an advocate. A helper.

Verse 8 tells us why we need help. Why we need an advocate...

Vs 8 says... ⁸When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because people do

not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

The Spirit will convict the world about sin, and righteousness and judgement. And we need help in that area.

We need to know God, we need to understand the scriptures. We need to be able to see ourselves clearly. And we can't do that without help.

The HS can help us to see ourselves clearly. And help us to change. The Holy Spirit is the one who we can invite into our lives. Who will be our helper.

If God puts something on your heart to do, or to change about yourself, you can rely upon the Holy spirit to help you.

The other important part of this passage is the call to us to preach His name, to be His witnesses. And it's really clear that we don't do this alone.

Evangelism is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are tools of that evangelism. But it's His doing. If anyone here has faith, that is thanks to the Holy Spirit revealing these truths to you. I'd like it to be down to my amazing preaching... and I hope and pray that the HS speaks through me, but it's not me, or Dan, or anyone else, it's the HS.

Personhood / Personal qualities of the Holy Spirit

Now earlier I talked about the personhood of the Holy Spirit, even though the Spirit doesn't have a body or DNA, they have qualities that distinguish them as a person. The Bible talks of the HS having feelings. There are passages that tell us that the HS can be angry, sad, insulted and blasphemed against. **Is 63:10; Mt 12:31; Ac 7:51; Eph 4:30; Heb 10:29**).

The HS has intentions, shows willfulness and discretion, loves, communicates, testifies, teaches, and prays (**Neh 9:20; Jn 15:26; Ac 13:2; Rm 8:26,27; 15:30; 1Co 12:11**).

The HS glorifies Jesus. That's a good clue if you're wondering if something is the work of the HS.

Pronouns and Gender

I'm going to do a bit of a dive into the person and gender of the holy spirit.

It's good to acknowledge when and why understandings differ amongst Christians. The gender and personhood of the HS is one of these.

I mentioned earlier that in many places the HS is referred to as 'it'. Saying 'it' gets you out of saying he or she. The English language only has he, she or it, masculine, feminine, but *it* is normally for an impersonal object and the HS is not an impersonal object.

I tend to say the HS or they, in order to achieve the same. I don't want to assign a gender, but I don't wish to call the HS 'it'.

Dan would call the HS 'he'. A person and masculine. This is the standard English-speaking tradition.

Other traditions would call the HS *she*. Some of the early church fathers referred to the HS as feminine. Semitic languages, such as is used in the Syriac church refer to the HS as feminine. Semitic language is derived from Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke.

It's a question of language.

In the Hebrew the word for spirit 'ruah' is feminine. In Greek the word 'Pneuma' is neutral. In Latin it is masculine – spiritus.

So in Genesis, written in Hebrew, the HS has chosen a feminine form noun with which to describe themselves, Genesis 1:2 the translation could be 'the spirit of God she was hovering over the face of the waters'.

It's not that quite straight forwards... linguists will appreciate that the spirit, the noun may be feminine, but that doesn't make the object of the sentence feminine.

In the English language the masculine and feminine pronouns carry more biological or physical weight than they do in Greek and Hebrew. They're more loaded. Jesus in his humanity is male, but God and the HS are divine, they have no flesh and blood, no male or female body parts, no DNA. They are not bound as we are and do not age as we do.

God and HS are regularly described in the Bible as having maternal and feminine images, as well as the better known fatherly and masculine ones. Genesis tells us that God's image is reflected across both male and female (Gen 1:27).

The first two names for God, Father and Son, are masculine.

In the passage we read today from John Verse 7, the word 'comforter' (or advocate or Helper) is masculine. Jesus uses the masculine form of the pronoun. So Jesus himself is referring to the HS as masculine. That's pretty good authority!

There is, as you can imagine, a lot of conversation about this. Each group has their own view and language. (Messianic Jews, Moravian Brethren). You are very welcome to do your own research and come back and share with me what you think.

I try to remain neutral in my language for the Holy Spirit, which is a tongue twister. Dan will always use the masculine. Don't read too much into this. The Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. Not confined to material form. Constant. True. Ready to clothe us, ready to teach and guide us.

My HS story

You yourself may have had Holy Spirit moments. Or, like on that first Pentecost, a very specific HS moment. Some people describe the coming of the HS on them almost exactly as the original event is recorded.

I know that the CoS isn't exactly a charismatic denomination. Depending on your background you might look at more HS movements with some suspicion, or fear. Or maybe you're in with both feet. You've had those experiences that you simply can't explain in any other way. You love the HS and you can't understand why we don't share our HS stories more.

So I thought I'd share my HS story with you. Because it really was the most gentle and yet deeply convicting event where I got to understand the HS more deeply. You may have heard parts of this before.

As a child I witnessed events whereby hands were laid on and the Holy Spirit came and people fell down. And it simply scared me. I didn't want to be part of it. As an adult I saw events that were very similar, and I'll be honest, I didn't like them any more. I could recognise the power. But I did not want to be knocked out on the floor in some public gathering thank you very much.

I made friends with someone who had a hugely powerful HS experience. She prayed to be filled with the HS and she was. The Spirit came on her like a fire. She was speaking in tongues. Unbelievable. Life changing. Powerful.

Again I recognised the power. The truth. I knew I needed to walk straight with God. But I simply didn't want it - not like that. So I prayed. I prayed a prayer of repentance. Of sorry I strayed. Sorry I walked away.

I prayed a prayer of asking to walk closer with Jesus again. To change my path. To walk with Him.

And I prayed that the HS would come upon me- fill me- but not freak me out. I was pretty needy with my prayer.

And after I prayed it I did not feel overcome with fire. Or start speaking in tongues. Or fall down.

But the next day a colleague came to see me. He'd been praying and heard the voice of God, the voice of Jesus, the voice of the Holy Spirit – I think you can use any of these terms here – telling him to come and see me and tell me that God was giving me a new pair of shoes.

That was it. Nothing I could not cope with. Nothing painful or public. Nothing more or less than exactly what I had asked for. To walk closer with Him. To walk His path. To be a bearer of His image. And he sent me a new pair of shoes.

Conclusion

That's the HS, filling us, clothing us, moving through us. Gentle. Knowing what we need.

It wasn't the drama of Pentecost for me. I don't know if you have experienced the HS as this. Or as fire and wondrous signs. Or simply as a quiet voice. God doesn't need to shout. He's mighty. If we listen, he will whisper.

If you want to walk closer with God, experience the Holy Spirit for yourself, be clothed powerfully and personally with the spirit of truth, then Jesus ascended so that you could. The HS is for you too.

Amen.

Let's Pray

Father God, Thank you that you released your Holy Spirit to be our advocate. Our helper. And Lord we need your help.

Thank you that we do not need to wait for Pentecost to be filled with your Spirit. That we live in this time and that this is your gift offered to us.

For those seeking your Spirit Lord we pray that you meet them where they need to be met. A personal, tailored clothing in your power.

Fill us all afresh today we pray.

Amen.