

“Pentecost and the Spirit Who Connects Us to God”

John 14:15-27, 15:26-27, 16:4b-7,12-15

June 8, 2025 (Pentecost)

Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service

Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

It’s Pentecost Sunday – the day when we remember and reflect on the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Church.

Christ came. He died on the cross. He rose from the dead. After forty days he ascended to heaven, to the right hand of God the Father, and then, ten days after that, on Pentecost, he poured out the Holy Spirit on the Church.

Now, the Holy Spirit has always been at work among the people of God, and has always been active in the hearts and lives of believers. That did not start at Pentecost. But at Pentecost the Spirit was given to the Church in a special way to equip it for its mission to the world.

And so Pentecost is a time of year where we can consider both the worldwide mission of the Church, that’s equipped by the Holy Spirit, and also a time when we can reflect on the work that the Holy Spirit has always done among God’s people – both before and after the Day of Pentecost.

This morning we’ll be focusing more on that second theme: on ways that the Holy Spirit has always been at work among God’s people, but which Jesus especially highlighted on the day of Pentecost.

With that in mind, let’s turn now to our text, from John 14, 15, and 16. (The bulletin says Acts – that’s my mistake. I meant John!)

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

Beginning in John 14 verse 15, Jesus said to his disciples:

^{14:15} “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Then, to chapter 15, Jesus continues:

^{15:26} “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

And now to chapter 16, beginning in verse 5. Jesus said:

“now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

[...]

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Most merciful God,
We thank you that you have poured out your Spirit on us, your people.
Holy Spirit, we ask you now to flood our hearts.
Revive our souls with your breath,
illuminate our minds with your light,
speak to us clearly, for you are the master of every language.
Grant, then, that we might truly hear your word,
be cut to the heart, believe your promises,
and put our hope in your work,
which we know is in perfect accord with the will of the Father,
and perfect unity with the work of the Son.
And it is in his name that we pray. Amen

Introduction

Our focus this morning is on the gift of the Holy Spirit – a gift God has always bestowed on his people, but which he poured out in a special way on the Church, on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus, in the passages from John we've just heard from, speaks of this gift, and how the presence of the Spirit blesses God's people.

There's a number of things going on there, but what I want to consider from these texts this Pentecost Sunday is that: God may seem distant to us, but through Christ, God has given us his Spirit, who forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

Let me say that again: God may seem distant to us, but through Christ, God has given us his Spirit, who forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

Let's break that down together.

God May Seem Distant to Us

The first thing for us to consider is that God may at times ... or maybe even may often ... seem distant to us.

God may seem distant to us.

And this is something that both Christians and non-Christians can struggle with.

For some, this leads them to adopt a disenchanted view of the world – a view where God and spiritual things are irrelevant or non-existent: where the material world is all there is to focus on – all that's really important for our day-to-day lives.

For others, there may be a belief in God ... but it's a god who is far off, and uninvolved with us and our day-to-day lives. He may be there ... he may even be watching ... but his distance and lack of involvement leaves us feeling more lonely, rather than less.

For others, this sense of God's distance leads them to suppose or assume a series of intermediaries between us and this distant God. In the ancient world this assumption manifested itself in religious sects who posited a long chain of spiritual beings between God and humanity. In modern stories the same impulse and assumptions seem to manifest themselves in books and television shows that imagine something like a bland and depressing angelic bureaucracy that oversees human affairs, while God is off doing something else.

And even Christians can have their own versions of this – as much of the medieval church, as well as some modern denominations, look to angels, or departed saints, or an earthly spiritual hierarchy to bridge the vast gulf they feel between themselves and God.

Still others don't look to intermediaries to bridge that gap, but they look to themselves. Some believe that if they are morally good enough – if they accomplish enough good works – then they will climb their way up closer to God, and by their good works they will bridge the gap they feel between themselves and God. Still others channel their spiritual efforts to spiritual practices, like prayer and meditation, with the hopes that by those kinds of efforts they will climb their way up to a state where they can more readily connect with this distant God.

Such approaches, rooted in our own efforts, make me think of a hiker, out in a wilderness valley, with no cell service ... who decides to climb a steep mountain, in the hopes that if they climb to the top, if they strain upwards, then maybe there they will get a cell signal – maybe from there they'll be able to reach ... somebody. But the signal they're trying to reach remains unmoved ... it's up to them to get close enough. This is how many people view God and the possibility of having any connection with him.

These are some examples ... but what does this sense of distance and detachment look like for you? How do you respond? How do you try to bridge the gap ... if you try at all?

Whatever form it may take ... the one thing these views all have in common is that, in them, God is not particularly interested in us personally.

If he's far off and can't be bothered to come closer ... or if he's sent others to take care of us, rather than coming to us himself ... or if he's put the responsibility on us to bridge the gap and climb our way up to him – whatever the details may be, if that's what you think God is like ... then that God is not particularly interested in us personally.

But by contrast, the Bible tells us that God – the true God – the Triune God who made us and rules over the universe ... that God is interested in us ... and does care for us deeply. The biblical God is a God who draws close.

He drew close to his people by calling them and caring for them – rescuing them and instructing them throughout the Old Testament.

Then, he drew especially close to his people in the incarnation – when God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, came to earth, and lived among his people, dying for their sins, and rising from the dead in order to overcome death on their behalf.

But then, as we discussed last Sunday, Jesus – God the Son incarnate – ascended to heaven.

He will come back. But he has not come back yet.

And in the meantime – in this in-between time – many people feel ... and we ourselves may often feel – that God seems distant to us.

That's the first thing for us to consider this morning – the spiritual backdrop for what our text has to tell us: that often, God seems distant to us.

But Through Christ, God Has Given Us His Spirit

But then second, in response to that, what we see in these passages from the Gospel of John, is that through Christ God has given us his Spirit.

God may seem distant to us, but through Christ God has given us his Spirit.

Our text this morning tells us that both God the Father and God the Son have given God the Holy Spirit to us.

In John 14:16, Jesus said: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” – that is, the Holy Spirit.

In verse 26 of chapter 14 Jesus says: “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things.”

In chapter 15, verse 26, Jesus says: “when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

And in 16:7 Jesus says of the Holy Spirit “I will send him to you.”

In their workings in redemptive history, the Father and the Son both send the Holy Spirit to us, so that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, to us, as God’s people, as a gift.

And this act in redemptive history points to an even deeper spiritual truth about the eternal relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While the Father begets the Son from all eternity, and the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from them both.

This is what we confess when we sing together the Nicene Creed: we say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.”

The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. Which is why, in his work within redemptive history, the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, to us.

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is a gift, whom the Father and the Son both give to us. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the very being of God the Father and God the Son, to us.

That’s what we confess in our creeds. That’s what’s being described by Jesus in these passages from John’s Gospel. That’s one of the things we are reminded of on this Pentecost Sunday.

God may seem distant to us, but through Christ God has given us his Holy Spirit.

The Spirit Forms a Direct Connection Between the Depts of Our Soul, and the Depths of Our God

And that's important. Because another thing we see in our text, and which the Bible teaches us in many places, is that the Holy Spirit forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

God may seem distant to us, but through Christ God has given us his Spirit. And the Holy Spirit forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

Let's consider three aspects of that.

First, the Holy Spirit is connected to the depths of our souls. Jesus, after all, promises in verse 17 of chapter 14 that the Holy Spirit will dwell with us and will be in us.

David elaborates on the implications of this in Psalm 139. There he writes:

^{139:1} O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

David here reflects on how close the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God – is to us, as God's people.

For one thing, his presence with us is constant. We cannot escape it. We cannot flee from it. For all who trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit is always there, always with us. His presence is constant.

But it's not just constant. It's also deep. He's not just beside us. He is in us – in the very depths of our souls.

David describes how the Holy Spirit has searched us, and knows us. He knows our actions – when we sit down and when we rise. He knows our thoughts – even before they've reached us. He knows our paths and our ways. Even before we speak a word, he knows it altogether.

The Holy Spirit is connected to the depths of our souls.

But then second, the Holy Spirit is also connected to the depths of God. And that might seem like a silly point to make, because, as we've said, the Holy Spirit is God – he's the third person of the Trinity.

But it's a point worth pausing on.

Because I think we can sometimes think, or feel, or act as if the Holy Spirit is “God-light.” Like ... he's a watered-down version of God ... not really the core of God ... but more like the peripheral part of God ... the fringes of God ... with a bit lower intensity of God-ness than the Father or the Son. We might not say that, but we can sometimes think that way.

But that's not what the Holy Spirit's like. It's true that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the other two persons of the Trinity, but even as he is sent out – even as he comes to us – he is no less God than the other two persons. Rather, even as the Holy Spirit proceed out, he also reaches fully into the being of God. There is no inner depth of God that is exclusive to the Father or the Son, but not the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is intimately connected to the depths of God.

Which is why the Apostle Paul writes that the Holy Spirit “searches [...] the depths of God. For,” Paul continues, “who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” [1 Corinthians 2:10-11]

The Holy Spirit is intimately connected to the depths of God.

And the Holy Spirit is intimately connected to the depths of our souls.

And then, with that, the Holy Spirit forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

Paul gets at this when he talks about how this plays out in our prayer lives. He writes: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” [Romans 8:26-27]

The Holy Spirit knows our hearts, and knows God's heart, and so he is able to intercede for us in a way that is rooted in the depths of both. In our prayer life, he can form a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

We see this also in our text from John. The connection between us and our Triune God, formed by the Holy Spirit, is so strong that Jesus says to his disciples that the Spirit: "dwells with you and will be in you. [...] I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. [...] If anyone loves me [...] my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. [...] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things [...] he will guide you into all the truth, [...] He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; [...] he will take what is mine and declare it to you." [John 14:17, 20, 23, 26; 16:12-15]

The Holy Spirit so deeply links us to God that he takes all that the Father has, and all that the Son has and declares it to us. The Spirit, in some mysterious way, as he dwells in us, makes it true that we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us, and as Jesus is in the Father, so we too are in the Father. Words seem insufficient, as Jesus expresses the intimate connection between us and God through the Holy Spirit. But though we may struggle to understand it, it is clear that the Holy Spirit forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

The Church Father Augustine reflected on this truth when he prayed to God about Christians, saying: "There you are in their hearts, in the hearts of all those who confess you." [V.2.2]

Elsewhere in his *Confessions* he wrote to God: "You were more intimately present to me than my inmost being" [III.6.12] – or, as some have paraphrased it: "You were closer to me than I am to myself."

By the Holy Spirit, Augustine tells us, God is closer to us than we are even to ourselves. And if that seems confusing, then you might be getting his point. God knows us better than we know ourselves. God is more intimately acquainted with our hearts than we are acquainted with ourselves. God, by the Holy Spirit, is more intimately present to us than we are present even to ourselves.

That's true of all who place their trust in Jesus Christ.

And here's an interesting thing. Augustine also stressed that that closeness of God to his own soul was true in his own life ... even when he failed to realize it – even when he felt as if God was distant. Even then, he explains, God was present with him – intimately close to his own heart. [VI.1.1; V.2.2]

Which a reminder for us that these things Jesus says in our text this morning about how close his Spirit is to all who trust in him – about how intimately the Spirit connects all of God's people to God ... that's true for all who trust in Jesus ... whether it feels true at a given moment, or in a given season of life, or not.

Whether or not you sense the Spirit's presence, if you are a Christian, and if you trust in Jesus, then the Spirit of God is present in you – the depths of our God are connected with the depths of your soul. And that's important because it should shape how you approach God.

It means that even when you may struggle to know what to say in prayer, you should pray anyway, because the Holy Spirit is in you, and as the Apostle Paul says, when we pray, "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." [Romans 8:26]

It means that even when you struggle to read the Scriptures, you should put them before yourself anyway, because the Holy Spirit is in you, and as Jesus says, the Spirit will take what is God's and declare it to you. [John 16:14-16]

It means that even when you are discouraged, when you are dismayed, when you feel acutely your own sin or your shortcomings, or the weight of your circumstances, you should not despair, because even if it's true, even so, God has loved you enough to pour his Holy Spirit into your heart – to forge a connection and a bond between the depths of your heart and the depths of his own heart – to draw so close to you by his Spirit, that he himself is closer to you than you are to yourself.

And so you are never alone. You are never without hope.

God may seem distant to us, but through Christ God has given us his Spirit. And the Holy Spirit forms a direct connection between the depths of our soul and the depths of our God.

Conclusion

God often works in our lives through means. When we are struggling, he uses common-grace means to minister to us biologically, socially, and intellectually. When we trust in him, he also uses special-grace means to minister to us spiritually, relationally, and mentally. Through ordinary earthly gifts, and through special gifts bestowed on his Church, God grows us and shapes us through means – through good earthly things he has given to us and chosen to use as his tools in our lives. That is certainly true, and we are called to make use of these means, trusting that God will work through them.

That is true.

But our text also reminds us that God, by His Spirit, is also close enough to us to work directly in our hearts.

When we are anxious or distressed, God, by his Spirit, present in the depths of our soul, can give us a peace that surpasses human understanding. [Philippians 4:7]

When we are overcome with grief or distress, so that we are close to even despairing of life itself, God, by his Spirit, present in the depths of our soul, can pour out his abundant comfort, so that we are truly comforted. [2 Corinthians 1:3-11]

When we are perplexed and lacking in understanding, God, by his Spirit, present in the depths of our soul, is able to generously give us wisdom – wisdom that comes from the Father. [James 1:5,17]

When we are blind to our own sin, lacking in insight of where we have gone wrong, we can ask God, by his Spirit, who is present in the depths of our soul, to search us and know us – to sift our thoughts and to reveal any grievous way that is in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. [Psalm 139:23-24]

When we are weak, and feel like we cannot go on, God, by his Spirit, who is present in the depths of our soul, can give us his strength in the midst of our weakness, because he is with us, and his grace is sufficient for us, as his power is made perfect in our weakness. [2 Corinthians 12:9, 4:7]

And when we feel alone, and like no one understands, we can turn to God, who, by his Spirit, who is present in the depths of our soul, will never leave us, whether we ascend to heaven, or make our bed in the depths, whether we take the wings of the morning, or let the darkness cover us – whatever the case may be, God’s Spirit is with us, intimately close to us, so that we are never alone.

Brothers and sisters, whatever your struggle, whatever your need, if you are in Christ, then God’s Spirit is with you, and in you, intimately connecting the depth of your soul with the depth of your God.

And he can supply your need.

Turn to him. Trust in him. Know that he is with you. And know that by his grace, he will never leave you nor forsake you.

This is the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit that we remember today.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

Augustine, *The Confessions*. Translated by Maria Boulding. Second Edition. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012.

Barrett, Matthew, Ronni Kurtz, Samuel G. Parkinson, and Joseph Lanier. *Proclaiming the Triune God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Life of the Church*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church’s core value of “Reformed Catholicity”), and also (following the Apostle Paul’s example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.