



# STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, May 2, 2010

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## Earth Wind & Fire

*The Holy Spirit — Sustainer (Week 3 of 4)*

**John 3:7-8** — *The Word from the Bible (The Message Version)*

***“So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”***

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### **How Do We See God?**

***E. Stanley Jones, the great writer and missionary to India states, “All religion is humanity’s search for God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only story of God’s search for a relationship with us.”***

Any study of the nature of and experience of God begins with what is called “the Trinity.” God can not be understood with one single truth. The nature of God is far beyond human comprehension. In the Christian faith, we understand God as Father or Creator, Son or Savior, and Holy Spirit – Sustainer. Each of these gives us only a partial understanding of the nature of and action of God in creation and in our lives. But at least it is a beginning to understanding the immense presence of God.

Even in the Trinity, our knowledge is limited. We are still left with questions about how God relates to and interacts with creation. Finally, we are left with descriptions like “*mystery,*” “*holy,*” “*awe inspiring*” or even “*unknown.*” The scripture promise that one day we will see all things clearly, as if “*face to face*” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

This week, we look at the Holy Spirit. In some ways, it is the most difficult and controversial of the Trinity. There is a wide range of interpretations of the Holy Spirit among Christian groups. For our purposes today, we will look at the most generally accepted views of the presence of God through the Spirit.

The key to finding God is to realize that God through Jesus Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit is seeking us. We are not alone in this search for God. God is always trying to break through our self-concern and need for independence to reach us. We want a relationship with God on our terms, but the God of all creation does not work like that. Our eyes must be opened to see the revelation of God’s love – the life giving Creator, the life-restoring Savior, and the life-empowering Spirit.

Our primary scriptures for today come from the gospel of John. In Chapter 3, John quotes Jesus directly speaking of the “*wind of the spirit.*” In chapter 13, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as comforter or advocate. Throughout the Bible, wind is used as a metaphor for the Spirit. The Spirit creates movement and change as the power of its presence provides the energy and life-giving presence of God. Where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there will always be change. The Spirit provides guidance, wisdom and direction. The direction of the wind always tells us something about what is to come. In the same manner, as we experience the Spirit of God, we can feel the direction God is pushing us and discern the changes that are coming to our lives. Finally, the wind is a cool breeze. It comforts and provides refreshment. Without the wind, nature, as we know it, would cease to exist. So it is with our lives. The Spirit takes our sorrows and turns them into joys.

### **The Ways of the Spirit – John 3:3-13**

John shares an important meeting with Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus. One would expect the conversation to revolve about the problem of whether salvation is possible through keeping the law. The rabbis taught that when all Israel kept the law, the kingdom of God would come. Jesus, however, immediately moves the discussion to a different

level. Salvation in the *kingdom of God* requires a new birth. This, by an ambiguity of the Greek word, is also a birth *“from above,”* or from heaven itself – a birth not merely in a baptism of *water*, such as John the Baptist offered, but a birth through the operation of the *Spirit*. Such a birth is possible only by belief in the Son of man and Son of God, namely Jesus himself. This *“new birth”* is a metaphor for the change that the presence of God brings to our priorities, way of living, and focus in life.

Jesus speaks of the unpredictability of the Spirit by comparing it to the wind in verse eight. We hear it and feel it, but we often do not know where it is leading us or how we will get there. This is the necessity of faith — an obedience to a loving God that is leading us to places of grace and goodness.

### ***We will never be left without God’s presence – John 13:31-16:33***

This passage is often called the farewell discourse. Jesus is reminding his disciples that the hard times that are coming have a purpose. He is careful to make sure they understand that the presence of God will never leave them. Their suffering and even death will always have meaning as long as they stay in the Spirit of God. Even though the disciples are having a hard time understanding Jesus’ words, we know that after the resurrection, they came to know the truth of these words. Otherwise, John would not have taken the time to share them with those followers that would follow. They had in fact experienced the power and presence of God through the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ ascension into heaven and thus relied on this presence to face every trial and challenge.

In fact there are two discourses here. They are separated by the strange summons of 14:31. *Rise, let us go hence, and the allegory of the vine* (15:1-9). They conclude with a final question, *Do you now believe?* (16:31). Both discourses deal with the same themes – the impending death, bodily departure, and continued presence of Jesus, and the consequences of these events for the life and mission of the disciples.

The parallelism of the two discourses is evident. The first (13:31-14:31) speak of the immediate fate of Jesus and his disciples in the impending crisis of his death. The second (15:10-16:33) projects this experience into the future life of his disciples – that is, the church – and their respective followers in the world.

This interweaving of present and future gives the discourse a dramatic tension. In the immediate situation the disciples will falter; Peter will indeed deny him; they do not understand what he is saying, do not know who he truly is; they will be scattered and leave him alone to his fate. Yet they will not really fall away. Only one, Judas, has irrevocably gone out into the *night* of the world which has rejected him. They will be valiant in witness even unto death, and in tribulation they will find joy. Though denial and desertion lie immediately ahead, they will *follow – and lay down their lives for him* as he is now going to lay down his life for them. The suffering of Jesus will be their suffering. His triumph will be theirs also.

*A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me* (16:16; 13:33 and 14:19). This prediction is the heart of Jesus’ discourse. The *“little while”* is of course the impending time of his death and departure. But John uses two Greek words for “see” which cannot easily be distinguished in English translation. In the first clause they are no longer to see him present physically. But in the second they will see him in his glorified, exalted life, in a vision that includes but surpasses mere physical sight. This second verb is used of the resurrection appearances in 20:18, 25, 29. It is a seeing that is also knowing; for though *“no one has ever seen God”* (1:18), *he who has seen me has seen the Father* (14:9).

This departure is not an occasion of *sorrow* but a cause of *joy* (16:20). Only thus can Jesus open the *way* to eternal life (14:6). There he is to *prepare a place* (14:2) for those who will *follow* him (13:36). And only by his return to the Father can he send *another, his Spirit*, who will be with the disciples at all times and in all places (14:16-17). So long as he is bound within his fleshly body, he is limited by time and space. His ascension assures his presence to his own people wherever they may be, forever. It is promise also of *greater works* than even he could do in his early life, for then *whatever you ask in my name, I will do it* (14:12-14).

The whole passage turns on the “other” – the Holy Spirit that Jesus send to guide and comfort. Who is this “other” whom Jesus will send? John calls him by a title peculiar his writings, *parakletos*, literally *“one called alongside,”* to help. The term is variously translated as *“advocate”* (1 John 2:1, where it is applied to Jesus himself), *“Counselor,” “Comforter”* (King James Version), but is better simply transliterated *“Paraclete.”* The discourse makes plain that the Paraclete is the *Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit*. He comes from the Father in Jesus’ name and *dwells* with the disciples. He is in fact, the presence of God in Christ continuing with his faithful servants after the ascension of Jesus, fulfilling and perfecting his work. Only the disciples will know him, for the world cannot receive him (17:17).

The work of the Paraclete is two-fold. Within the fellowship of Jesus’ disciples he is the guide and teacher of truth, to *bring to ... remembrance* what Jesus said (14:26) and reveal those *things that are to come* by virtue of

what Jesus accomplished (16:13). Thus he is to **declare** all that is of Jesus and about Jesus and so glorify him as Jesus has glorified the Father (16:14).

The Paraclete is also to witness, through the testimony of the disciples, to the world outside, convicting it of **sin and of righteousness and of judgment** (15:26-27; 16:8-11). He directs the disciples both in their preaching of the gospel and in their steadfast testimony in persecution. The love, the prayer, the obedience of the Christian disciple are the gift of grace of the Paraclete. This Spirit Jesus breathes on his disciples in the Resurrection (20:21-11; 14:27).

This conception of the Paraclete is rooted in the Old Testament witness to the Spirit of God who comes upon the prophets to inspire them to speak of God's words. But in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is poured forth not only on specific chosen witnesses but on all the faithful believers in Christ (Acts 2:33; 1 Corinthians 12:7-13).

Though the work of the Holy Spirit, the formation of God's plan for a relationship with creation is now complete. The life giver – Creator, the life redeemer – Savior, and the life guide – Holy Spirit is God – three in one. Together this is God's search for a relationship with us.

***“All religion is humanity's search for God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only story of God's search for a relationship with us.”***

## Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

***Remember... someone is praying for you. Have a great week!***

### **Come, Holy Spirit**

*This is a common prayer in the Catholic faith and is used extensively in the Emmaus community.*

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that  
by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

*of St. Augustine*

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.  
Move in me, Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.  
Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy.  
Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy.  
Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.

# Daily Readings

Each of these passages will prepare us for next week's sermon on the God as the Savior. Read these passages carefully each day. Examine your faith and dependence on God. What areas of your life need the saving grace of Jesus Christ? The study guide readings allow us to dig deeper.

**Monday, May 3 – Read John 1:29-34** — From the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, He is recognized as the one who life live as a sacrifice for all. In the words of John the Baptist, **"Here the one who takes away the sins of the world."** We often define sin as a moral or ethical breach and in some ways it can be. But sin literally is anything that separates us from God. Look at your life and priorities — is there anything that separates you from God or others? Check your calendar, you checkbook, your possessions; what do they tell you about your life? Where is God? Are you separated from God?

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**Tuesday, May 4 – Read Isaiah 52:13- 53** — These words written at least 500 years before the birth of Christ tell us of the purpose of Christ to save the world. Creation has been broken by our rebellion and selfish concern. But God will not leave us. In God's desire for a relationship with us, God is willing to do anything to make things right — even suffer and die. Do you know how much God loves you? If someone died for you, what would you be willing to do for that person? Now what are you willing to do for God? Love?

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**Wednesday, May 5 – Read Luke 4:16-30** — Jesus is given the opportunity to read in the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus reads the words of the prophet, and proclaims that this reading has been fulfilled in your hearing. This is the work of God restoring creation to the order for which it was created. In what ways are you fulfilling this passage?

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**Thursday, May 6 – Read Matthew 28:16-20**— Matthew records what may have been the last words of Jesus spoken before the accession into heaven. Jesus calls His followers to make disciples, baptize, and to teach, closing with these words, **"And low I will be with you even until the close of the age."** We are never alone in the task that Christ has set before us. What are you doing to share Christ, to teach the ways of Christ and to help others grow in their faith? Do you know the presence of Christ in your life? How?

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**Friday, May 7 – Read John 14:1-7** — The disciple Thomas asked the question, **"Lord, how will we know the way?"** And Jesus answered, **"I am the way, the truth and the life."** Do you want to know who God is? Then look at the love and presence of Christ. Jesus shows us the way to God, but God has already paved a way to us through Christ. Do you know the way, the truth and the life of Christ?

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