

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
November 9, 2025
9:30 AM

Text: John 14:15-17, 25-27

Theme: We Believe: "With the Father and the Son"

[prayer]

After three weeks reflecting on the work of Jesus, today the Creed introduces us to the Third Person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. [aside about pronouns for the Spirit]

*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 worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.*

Notice that the Creed calls the Holy Spirit "Lord," just like Jesus. This is again a reference to the Name of God, implying that, like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is also the One God. Just as Jesus was present before Creation as the Word of God, the Holy Spirit was also present as the life-giving breath of God. Our reading from Genesis reminds us that "the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life" (2:7 CEB). In Hebrew, the word for "spirit" is *ruach*; in Greek it is *pneuma*. Both words also mean "wind" and "breath." So, God formed human beings from the earth and breathed into us the *ruach/pneuma* - the Spirit, who is the giver of life. The very essence of life – the breath flowing in and out of our lungs – is the power of God the Holy Spirit in us.

The Council of Nicaea largely focused on controversies in the early Church about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, which is why the section of the Creed on Jesus is so long and the section on the Holy Spirit is so short. But this section of the Creed is not without its own controversy. The Creed

that we read today says that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” It is declaring that both God the Father and God the Son give us the Holy Spirit, and there is scriptural evidence for this belief. But this phrase is only found in Latin versions of the Creed. The Greek version of the Creed says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from only the Father. Christians in the Latin-speaking West added the phrase “and the Son” after the Council of Nicaea. This controversy is called the Filioque controversy (“filioque” is how you say “and from the Son” in Latin). Among other issues, the addition of the filioque clause led to the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity in 1054. Today Roman Catholics and most Protestants say that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son” while the Orthodox churches says that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father” only.

I won’t get into the theological minutiae that make a difference one way or the other in this debate. I will say, though, that the addition of the filioque clause undermines the spirit of the Nicene Council, whose mission was to create unity of belief across Christianity. This is why the United Methodist Council of Bishops, in the spirit of ecumenism, has called for the General Conference to adopt a version of the Nicene Creed that strikes the filioque clause.¹ We will have to wait and see whether the 2028 General Conference moves to do so.

Whether the Holy Spirit comes to us from the Father alone, or from both the Father and the Son, or from the Father *through* the Son, the prepositions involved are not as important as our belief that the Holy Spirit is as much God as the Father and Jesus. Ancient heresies about the Holy Spirit persist to this day, heresies that treat the Holy Spirit as lesser than God the Father and God the Son, like a divine servant or handmaiden or lapdog.

But the Creed declares that the Holy Spirit is “worshiped and glorified” equally with the Father and Son. The Nicene Creed is indisputably Trinitarian. We worship one God in three Persons. Though there are three Persons in the Trinity, they all share the exact same characteristics of Godhood. Together they give us a complete picture of who God is. We cannot understand God the Father without also understanding God the Son and God the Spirit. We cannot understand God the Son without understanding God the Father and God the Spirit. And we cannot understand God the Spirit without understanding God the Father and God the

¹ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/bishops-work-to-put-new-vision-into-action>

Son. Saint Athanasius put it succinctly: “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.”²

The Nicene Creed contains a lot of mysterious math – Jesus is simultaneously one-hundred percent divine and one-hundred percent human; God is one but also three. I emphasize the word “mysterious” because faith demands we accept some degree of mystery. As modern-day Christians living in an age of rapid scientific discovery and technological change, mystery makes us uncomfortable. But not everything we believe can be rationally explained. If it were, then we couldn’t call it faith.

Faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1 NRSVUE). Of the three Persons in the Trinity, it is the Holy Spirit who most embodies the demands of faith. In Jesus we could see and touch and hear God in a way that was grounded in our human experience. But we cannot see or touch or hear the Holy Spirit, at least not in the ways we are accustomed to. The Spirit challenges us to live our lives by faith, not by sight; to transcend the parts of our humanity that demand certainty and rational explanation and instead learn to trust that which we cannot explain.

This matter of trust was at the heart of Jesus’s farewell speech to the disciples. In our Gospel lesson Jesus offers the disciples words of preparation for the time when he would no longer physically be among them. Up until this point, the disciples had been witnesses and participants in Jesus’s ministry only. But soon he would be gone while they would remain. And the ministry that Jesus began would pass to them. It would be their responsibility to ensure it continued.

Imagine how overwhelmed and scared the Twelve must have felt as Jesus revealed he was giving his mission on earth to them to safeguard and continue. But Jesus anticipated their fear, which is why he promised “I will not leave you orphaned” (v. 18). He promised to send them another Paraclete who would be their Guide and Advocate. Paraclete (*paraklētos*) is the Greek name for the Holy Spirit. It means “one who has been called to our side.” That is a long name, so English translations of the Bible use a variety of names for the Holy Spirit that describe her various functions: Comforter (KJV), Counselor (NIV), Advocate

² Athanasian Creed

(NRSV). Paraclete, though, is the only word that captures the fullness of the Spirit's work – the work of accompanying Christians and the Church.

The first Paraclete was Jesus himself. Jesus is the God who was called to our side by becoming human. His ministry was also a ministry of accompaniment – accompanying us in our humanity. This accompaniment looked like hospitality and inclusion – think of the meals Jesus shared with sinners and outcasts. It looked like relief and liberation – think of the people Jesus healed and the message he preached. It even looked like protest and calling out sin – think of Jesus overturning the moneychangers' tables in the Temple. The record of Jesus's ministry is a record of God coming alongside the poor and the oppressed, advocating for the outcast, and teaching us what love looks like.

Did Jesus's ministry end when Jesus ascended into heaven? Was the revelation of God that came to us through the Incarnation only for the thirty odd years Jesus walked the earth? Jesus's departure presented a challenge to the disciples and a challenge to the Church: What happens after Jesus is gone?

The Holy Spirit is the answer to that question. The Spirit's work is to continue the ministry of Jesus in his absence. It is the Spirit who made it possible to know the revelation of God in Jesus after the first generation of disciples who knew Jesus in the flesh had passed into glory. The Holy Spirit is the link between the historical ministry of Jesus and the believing community that formed in the wake of his death, resurrection, and ascension. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to receive the same good news that the first generation of Christians saw and heard. Just like the Twelve, we have not been orphaned. God the Father and God the Son has sent us the Holy Spirit to guide, equip, and empower us as disciples. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus present to us even though he is physically absent.

The main way the Spirit continues to make Jesus present is by interpreting Jesus's teaching. This has always been the work of the Spirit. The Nicene Creed says that the Spirit has "spoken through the prophets." Before Jesus, God the Spirit spoke through prophets whose words interpreted God's Law and called Israel to account for their faithfulness (and lack thereof). After Jesus, the Spirit continues this work of interpreting God's words for the Church. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we read the Bible. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that I stand here and preach. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Coeur Team

gathers to discern God's vision for Community UMC. And it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we make our witness as followers of Jesus in the world. The Holy Spirit helps us contextualize our faith for our time.

Each new generation of Christians receives the gift of "the one who has been called to our side." The Holy Spirit enables the teachings of Christ to be heard fresh in each generation so that Jesus's mission can be carried on in a way that speaks to the unique problems and issues of the time. The Gospel is timeless but the way it is lived out in the world changes with each generation. The Holy Spirit is always speaking, always interpreting the words and will of God anew. And it is the sacred responsibility of the Church to always be listening, to seek her wisdom and guidance on behalf of a world that needs the Gospel. We are called through the Spirit to be givers of life in our own right as we offer hope and healing to our neighbors.

Saint Basil the Great, who was part of the generation that cemented Nicaea's legacy, wrote this about the Holy Spirit: "Everything that needs holiness turns to him. All that live virtuously desire him, as they are watered by his inspiration and assisted toward their proper and natural end. He perfects others...He is the source of life...He is the source of holiness, an intellectual light for every rational power's discovery of truth, supplying clarity...through himself."³

As Wesleyan Christians we speak of the process of sanctification, of going on to perfection as we grow in the love and knowledge of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that does that work of sanctification. She is our companion in ministry. She is the one who forms us as disciples of Jesus. Even now, she instructs us in the way to go. She challenges our understanding of faith and discipleship. She exhorts us to be lovers of compassion and doers of justice. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is many things, but above all she is concerned with the perfection of our faith. She is a tenacious Advocate for our continuous growth as followers of Jesus. And she is a tenacious Advocate for the mission of the Church as we make disciples for the transformation of the world.

Amen.

³ St. Basil, On the Holy Spirit, 9.22.