

November 3, 2019

## *“Live in the Spirit”*

OT: *Ezekiel 37:1-10*; Gospel: *Romans 8:1-11*

November 3, 2019

### **Prayer of Illumination:**

Heavenly Father, remove from our minds all doubt and hesitation in living and spreading the good news of the Gospel. Instill within us an attentive ear, alert mind and open heart to listen, understand and act on your will revealed in the Scriptures read and preached. Amen

### **Introduction:**

Earlier this year I attended a worship service where a Presbyterian Pastor preached on Satan, the Great Tempter, his kingdom in Hell, and the forces of evil arrayed against us. Throughout the history of Christendom there has been a tradition of upholding Biblical teachings in the Old and New Testaments on the reality of Satan, Hell and evil forces that tempt and work against us. My focus this morning is not on Satan, but on the person and work of the Holy Spirit as our champion and defender in the war waged on us by our **Adversary**.

Every Sunday in the Presbyterian Church we testify to our belief in the Triune God reciting one of the Creeds or Confessions of the Reformed Church. In the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds we declare our faith in the three persons of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all sharing the same substance as one God. In the Nicene Creed we testify that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. We dedicate a lot of time preaching and teaching about the Father and Son. But the Holy Spirit, as the 3rd Person of the Trinity, may not get the same attention in Church and be something of a mystery.

The Holy Spirit is an active force impacting our lives sometimes in mysterious, and yet, transformational ways. One case in point is the recent revelation by Kanye West on Fox News that he is finishing an album, “Jesus is King.” My ears perk up – this gets my attention. He is a rapper and I am not familiar with his music. So, I am wondering about this. I hear Mr. West tell the reporter, “My job is to spread the Gospel.” He is publicly committing himself to following the way of Christ. Mr. West is witnessing to Christ through his music. I’m thinking, how did this happen?

I believe the answer is provided by Adam Hamilton, in his Biblical education series, The Apostles’ Creed, who speaks of the powerful effect of the Spirit acting upon us. “**The Spirit,**” he teaches, “**is the voice of God whispering to us.**” The Holy Spirit is the voice of God whispering to you and me. The Holy Spirit whispered to Kanye West, and he responded, bringing people to Christ.

This has special meaning for me because I have had this experience. The years before I started Seminary were busy. I had authored a book, and started a consulting practice, and had family obligations. So, starting Seminary is on my mind but competing with all the business stuff and family responsibilities swirling around me. One evening I am in bed beginning to doze off. I am in that twilight state of not being fully awake but not asleep either. My mind is clear, looking forward to a good night’s sleep. The only sound is water running in the bathroom as my wife is preparing for bed. Then, in my left ear I hear a soft, yet distinct whisper: “**Follow the Spirit!**” I am not used to hearing voices. I look around, being alone, I am stunned. I call out to Starann in the next room: “Did you hear that voice?” “What voice,” she replied? I begin to get it! This is a wake-up call and a command. I had felt the call to ministry many years earlier but had put it off. The message now: No more dragging my feet. No more excuses. My priority is to prepare for service in the Church. Get on with it!

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you in a dream, or whispers deeply within your heart or mind, what will you do? Will you accept his call to serve and act upon it? Or, will you ignore it as I did as a younger man and hope it will go away? My friends, once he comes calling he does not give up. I tell you from experience he is very persistent. But when we accept his call for our life purpose, then our wants take a back seat. All the worldly things valued by society: wealth, professional reputation, ego and self-gratification, are perishable and diminish in importance. When we live in the Spirit these worldly matters of pride used by Satan to our peril cease being the driving forces in our life. We accept it is the things of God revealed by the Spirit that are imperishable, eternal and our highest priority.

Sermon: Live in the Spirit, Romans 8:1-11, 11/03/19. Cooks

November 3, 2019

**The Body:**

As Presbyterians, we believe the Bible is the authoritative Word of God and our primary authority in all matters of faith and living the Christian life. In the **Old Testament** the Spirit is described as the breath, wind and Spirit of God. He is the agent of creation representing God's awesome power. In Genesis 1:2, we read: "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters." In Psalms 33:6, the psalmist writes: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth." In Ezekiel 37 the Spirit is the source of inspiration and power for the prophet as a vehicle of God's revelation, prophecy and activity. "The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley." God commissions Ezekiel saying: "I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them." The Spirit of God renews, transforms, and restores Ezekiel and **you and me**, and **all believers**. He restores us to love God in faithful, obedient service to his Word and People.

The work of the Holy Spirit is the central theme in the **Book of Proverbs** written by Solomon as inspired by God. The Spirit guides us to embrace the righteous wisdom of living a Godly life. Solomon calls this righteous wisdom commended by God, "**Lady Wisdom**." Years ago I commented in a sermon how surprising it must have been in male dominated Jewish society to hear righteous wisdom of the Spirit called "Lady Wisdom." One of the women in the congregation immediately spoke up: "**Well, what's so surprising about that!**" Ladies, do I hear an Amen? Amen!

The Spirit is also revealed in the **New Testament** as the instrument of divine action in our lives. In John Chapter 14 Jesus is within hours of his betrayal and arrest and promises to send the Spirit of Truth to all generations of the faithful. The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, will comfort, counsel and lead us to live according to God's purpose. In the midst of our doubts, our hesitation, our unwillingness to change the comfortable patterns of our life, the Spirit reassures and influences us to walk the path of faithful obedience. In the midst of worldly temptations the Evil One uses to lure us down the path of darkness, the Spirit of Truth is our Advocate and Armor for countering evil. The Holy Spirit enables us to live in the light and love of God. Our job is to listen and obey God's Word and follow where the Spirit leads.

The **Apostle Paul** emphasizes in Romans 8:6 our calling to "Live New Life." "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." (NIV) Paul teaches when we live new life in Christ we are not slaves to bodily sin. But if we are or become an obedient slave to sin, then we reject relationship in the grace and love of Christ. We will believe living in sin is the only way to live. We will live as if power, control and money are the things that matter. Dominating people will be our path to success. We will live as if any and all sensual pleasures are the highest form of good. In living as a slave to sin our wants become more important than our faithful obedience to God. The result, says Paul, is eternal death!

By responding to the work of the Spirit rather than worldly ways, we live in and follow Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus lives and we share in his grace, love, and resurrection, means he seals his covenant with us in his body and blood for all time. Evil as the controlling force in our lives is defeated but not eliminated. We must continue to fight the on-going battle against temptation and sin as Paul teaches in Galatians 5:25. "**If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**" **FOLLOW THE SPIRIT!**

To live and walk in the Spirit is the life of the Church. The Spirit of Christ is present as we worship signified by our lighted candles. He is with us in prayer, in lifting our voices of praise in song, reading Scripture, preaching, teaching, and in celebrating the Sacraments. We are baptized in the Spirit as was Christ and adopted into his Universal Church of all believers. In the Lord's Supper the Spirit of Christ is present as the bread and wine is blessed symbolizing his Body and Blood sacrificed for our redemption. We are in communion with him giving thanks for his grace, mercy and love in his death and resurrection. The Spirit transfers power in the laying on of hands as deacons, elders and pastors receive authority and blessing in their ordination. The Spirit of Christ comforts us in the laying on of hands and anointing with oil for healing pain,

November 3, 2019

sorrow and despair. We walk in the Spirit giving our time, talent and resources to support the needy and carrying his good news into our community!

**CLOSING:**

In I Corinthians 3:16, Paul teaches: “You are God’s Temple and the Spirit lives within you!” By prayer, Bible study, and works of faith, seek out and embrace the Holy Spirit. Hear and respond to the Spirit whispering to you as the voice of God saying “Follow Me.” Follow the Spirit living in peace, harmony and love with God, your family, Church family, neighbors and strangers. Share the good news with those who may not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Be a “God sighting” to others reflecting in your words and actions, the love and comfort of the Spirit of God. Live in the Spirit! Amen.