

John 14:25-27; 16:4b-15 2 Timothy 1:1-14 October 2, 2016
World Communion Sunday

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

THAT'S THE SPIRIT!

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus talked with his disciples about going away and leaving them behind. Naturally, the disciples were distressed and confused.

The renowned American preacher, Dr. Fred Craddock, compared these worried disciples to little children playing on the living room floor. They look up and see mom and dad putting on their coats and getting ready to walk out the door. The children ask their parents, "Where are you going? Can we come, too? Then who is going to stay with us when you're gone?"

Jesus assured his disciples, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

Then Jesus reassured his disciples with the promise of an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who is going to stay with them when he is physically gone away from them. "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:6-7, 13)

When the older Apostle Paul wrote his letters to Timothy his younger protégé, Timothy might well have been distressed and concerned. Paul was reaching the end of his ministry and his life. Timothy was being left to assume responsibility for the gospel ministry as a leader in the church in a hostile and threatening world. In a sense, Paul gives Timothy the same advice and assurance that Jesus gave his disciples. Paul told Timothy, "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us." (2 Timothy 1:7, 14)

In June 1983, after 122 years of separation dating from the Civil War, the so-called "Northern" Presbyterian Church (the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America) and "Southern" Presbyterian Church (the Presbyterian Church in the United States) reunited at the General Assembly Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. Elder Joe Eaddy from our church was a commissioner to the reunion General Assembly.

Reunion was a long time coming, 118 years after the North and South were reunited following the end of the Civil War. At the time of the reunion of the Northern and Southern churches, as in so many important times in church history, it was impor-

tant to find a common identity and say what we believe. So, “A Brief Statement of Faith” was written to express the new church’s common faith, built on the core values and beliefs of the past, but with an eye to a challenging future.

The brief statement of faith begins and ends with praise to the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first two major sections proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ and God. The third and final major section begins with these words: “We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life.” As I share these words of faith, listen for echoes of Jesus’ promise to his disciples and Paul’s encouragement to Timothy about the role of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives:

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and bind us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.

The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth,
praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

We do live in a broken and fearful world.

We can feel distressed and confused.

We can feel abandoned by God.

We can feel overwhelmed by life.

We can wonder, “Who’s going to be with us in the midst of all of this turmoil in our world and our lives?”

The answer today is the same as when Jesus was with his disciples on his last night on earth — the Spirit of truth, the Advocate, God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

If it were all up to us, we would have every reason to feel distressed and confused and abandoned and overwhelmed and hopeless. How are we supposed to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace? Those are hard things to do. They won't necessarily make us real popular. They certainly go against the grain of the ways of this world.

But Paul reminds Timothy, and all the rest of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ, "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began . . ." (2 Timothy 1:8-9)

How can we begin to fulfill God's holy calling in our lives? One important way is to come to the Lord's table this morning. Remember, "the same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church."

Another of our church's confessions of faith, dating from the 16th century, is the Second Helvetic Confession, which was written in an attempt to bring reconciliation between disagreeing parties within the Church. That confession of faith says "This holy Supper also seals to us that the very body of Christ was truly given for us, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins, lest our faith should in any way waver. . . Therefore the faithful receive what is given by the ministers of the Lord, and they eat the bread of the Lord and drink of the Lord's cup. At the same time by the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit they also inwardly receive the flesh and blood of the Lord, and are thereby nourished unto life eternal." (*Book of Confessions*, Section 5.196)

That's the Spirit — the Advocate, the Comforter, the guide to truth, the Spirit of the risen Lord, the Spirit who calls us and sustains us and empowers us for the joyful yet challenging call to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in a broken and fearful world.

Let us pray: We praise you, God, for your Holy Spirit, who guides our steps and brings us gifts of faith and love; who prays in us and prompts our grateful worship. We praise you, God, above all, for your Son Jesus Christ, who lived and died and lives again for our salvation; for our hope in him; and for the joy of serving him. Amen.