

03.16.25 ~ Lent 2
“The Hospitality of the Holy Spirit”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 51:7-12 ^{NIV}

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Leader: These Words of Welcome Are from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

John 14:15-27 ^{NIV}

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Leader: These Words of Jesus Are of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Holy Spirit, come now in these words to fill our hearts and minds with your comfort, counsel, and grace. We thank you for our time spent with you and each other during the week and already today. We gather again to worship you in fellowship, praise, and wonder, despite our burdens and confusion in our world. We know you are sovereign. Help us to hear **your** message of hospitality. So please clear our minds, Lord, to receive your guidance and inspiration from these passages; let us apply it personally and as a church. May **your** voice renew, refresh, and strengthen us for the weeks to come. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Happy St. Patrick's Day! St. Patrick's Day is supposed to be a religious holiday for Irish Christians, commemorating the death of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, and his role in bringing Christianity to the country in the 5th century. But we know it has also become a party holiday with green beer, corned beef, cabbage, or shepherd's pie. So be careful out there today as you drive home. Thank you to those who wore green!

We continue to introduce our theme of "Vital Hospitality" from a spiritual sense. We've learned a broader view of the word, through the hospitality of Scripture, Prayer, Relationships, Sacred Rest, and more recently, the hospitality of God and of Jesus. So today, we discover the hospitality of the Holy Spirit. Surprisingly, the Spirit appears often in the Old Testament: any time the divine works through leaders, we see a glimpse of it, such as in Moses' power, selecting kings Saul and David, through Joseph's dream interpretations, through the prophets and in God's wisdom literature. Of course, in the Gospels, the Holy Spirit is illustrated through Jesus' miracles, his baptism, the resurrection, and of course at Pentecost. Let us start with our Psalm 51.

It is a familiar confession. Although we think of it as David's repentance about his time with Bathsheba, most of it was written during

the exile. The writer's structure is petition for forgiveness of sin and a petition to blot out his iniquities as he desires inner change; the psalmist asks for a clean heart and a new divine spirit, union with God, to receive joy in God's salvation, and to attain a willing human spirit. The Holy Spirit of the Gospels has not yet arrived in Psalm 51, but since we believe in the triune God, let us observe the spirit and hospitality of forgiveness. We are welcomed and transformed by God through our faith. Cleansing of our hearts and souls are part of our preparation to receive the Spirit's welcome. "Hyssop" in the first verse was a small bushy plant used in ritual cleansing by sprinkling holy water or oil over a person. Here it is used figuratively.

The Holy Spirit is a parallel synonym for God's presence, as illustrated in the joy of restored relationship. It is in the John passage that we meet the Holy Spirit in relationship to Jesus Christ and the individual. In the early part of John, Chapter 14, which we will read again closer to Easter, Jesus challenges his disciples that he has already taught them where his journey will lead, but Thomas and the others are confused and say they do not know where he is going. That leads us into today's verses where Jesus comforts his disciples' confusion by reassuring them that he will send a counselor after he leaves. This comforter, advocate, and counselor will teach them and interpret for them what they need to know to continue his work.

The ongoing presence, advocate, and counselor is called the "Paraclete," from the Greek "*parakletos*" a verb to comfort or to intercede. The Paraclete is the divine presence among believers and empowers them to be God's presence in the world. By revealing the truth

and glory of Jesus to believers, they can better share their faith and testimony with the broader community, as can we.

The hospitality of God we learned about was his divine, glorious, and radiant power; the hospitality of Jesus we affirmed was the protection of his salvation. The hospitality of the Spirit comes in as individuals try to accept the very spirit of Jesus into their hearts in that form of the *paraclete*. And the heart is where vital, life-giving hospitality begins! We think of hospitality both in the Bible and on earth in today's culture as the practice of receiving and extending friendship and welcome to strangers. That is not wrong, just incomplete. Externally, that is true and yes, that definition is true for the Holy Spirit as well. But there is more. The Spirit does not judge our worthiness or have expectation; he is as tender and patient, welcoming and forgiving as Jesus was and is. Like Jesus, the Spirit's hospitality is internal, loving, forgiving, and yet a bit demanding. "Jesus said, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching . . . [John 14:23a].'" This generosity of the Spirit of Truth also energizes and revives us, giving us courage to continue the work of Christ (John 14:18-19).

The Gospel of John even uses words of a home or household to describe how the Holy Spirit will inhabit our hearts: "dwell with believers" or "take his abode with him" in the older translations; we read will **live with** us. And don't those who live with us truly know who we are? So does the Spirit who dwells within to guide us, give us encouragement and direction, continues to teach us and to carry on his Kingdom work. In Jesus' instruction to his disciples, he knows what harm is coming to his physical body and realizes that his disciples are just beginning their journey. So, he must leave them something to help and

strengthen their faith when things get bad. “Peace, I leave with you . . .”
 What better gifts? Peace and assurance of comfort and wisdom.

Going back to Psalm 51, to receive what Jesus promises, the Holy Spirit, our hearts must be clean and pure, and ready to receive the Holy Spirit within. Just as we do a housecleaning right before guests arrive, we must throw open the figurative windows to our hearts and minds, and dust, vacuum, bleach, change linens, and prepare food. The Holy Spirit shares that hospitality for our souls, yet we must get ready to receive and accept it as well. I suggest it is **mutual** hospitality. We go to Jesus in sin, yes, but his blood on the cross washes us whiter than snow as the old hymn says. His grace is given freely and unconditionally to us and in us through his gift of the Holy Spirit. Are we ready to receive such a divine **guest**? Lent is the perfect time to prepare ourselves personally and as a church to receive this spiritual gift of grace as well as the human gifts of those we have not yet met. Are you ready or will you get ready during this Lenten season? Will you accept this hospitality from the Holy Spirit to **receive** his comfort, advocacy, courage, and direction, living it out in obedience? Another profound question that leads us to *Vital Hospitality*. Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your teaching, your example, and your presence. Open our minds and hearts to accept the divine Spirit of Truth that accompanies our faith in you. Give us your insights personally and as a church to answer the call to hospitality this year. May you build our understanding of these complex kingdom insights to fuel our mission and purpose to serve you and to share our faith with others. It is in Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.