

The impact and role of the Holy Spirit

John 14:18-27, John 16:5-16

Let's review what we looked at the last three Sundays about being an Anabaptist Christian. Core Value number one: Jesus is the centre of our faith. This is seen and lived in three major ways. Jesus is to be followed in daily life. The Bible is interpreted from a Christ-centered point of view. Jesus is accepted as both Savior and Lord and has our highest loyalty.

Core Value number two is: Community is the centre of our life. For this to fully blossom, Forgiveness is essential for community. The Scriptures are interpreted in community with dialogue & group discernment. Community is experienced in face to face groups. Believing in Jesus, belonging to the church, and behaving in a new way, become real in the context of community.

The third Core Value we looked at is: Reconciliation is the center of our work. We carry this out when we help reconcile people to God. We help people reunite to each other. And we are ambassadors of reconciliation in the world.

These summarize the convictions that Jesus followers in the early church and then the early Anabaptists were willing to suffer and die for. But for all this to take place in our lives and for these core convictions to impact the world, we are dependent on another factor. Mennonite Brethren leader J. B. Toews said, "Correct theology, even Anabaptist theology, without the experiential knowledge of Christ through the Holy Spirit, leaves the church impotent."

Palmer Becker writes, "The Holy Spirit can be seen as the central hub to our understanding of Jesus, community and reconciliation. There is a common denominator between

what happened in and through the life and ministry of Jesus, the early church, the Anabaptist movement, and what is happening in many congregations today. That common denominator is the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit.

So we cannot just look at theology and history as we reflect back 500 years and prepare for the next 500 years. This knowledge helps change lives, convicts people of sin, exposes people to the logic about Jesus, and helps us find meaning, but it isn't enough. The Holy Spirit transforms the thoughts, emotions, and actions of those who open their lives to the grace of God.

Jim Wallis, the editor of Sojourners Magazine says it well: "The New Testament stresses the necessity of a radical turnabout and invites us to pursue an entirely different course of life. Thus, conversion is far more than an emotional release and much more than an intellectual adherence to correct doctrine. It is a basic change in life direction." For this to occur, and for people to stick to this change and direction, the Holy Spirit is needed.

Historian Peter Klassen observes that throughout the early Anabaptist movement, "There was a profound conviction that the Holy Spirit was at the centre of Christian experience. The work of the Holy Spirit enabled the followers of Christ to rise above legalism to the transforming life of joyful obedience."

One of the elements that often gets lost or deliberately ignored, because of our uncomfortableness with the Holy Spirit, when people study and talk about Anabaptist history, is its role. But in the book, *Anabaptist Essentials, Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith*, significant space is given to the Holy Spirit, including the chapter, "The

Holy Spirit is Essential.” Becker maintains that the “Anabaptist movement can rightfully be called the charismatic or Holy Spirit movement of the 16th century.”

In the booklet, *What is an Anabaptist Christian?*, a constant theme is the role of the Holy Spirit, even though it’s not high-lighted with a chapter title. We read reminders like this. “To be a Christian for the early disciples, meant more than being a believer or worshipper. It meant being a Spirit-filled person who was obeying Jesus in daily life. Because of their commitment to Jesus and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, people noticed that they were being transformed to become Christ-like in their attitudes and lifestyles.”

Becker uses the term, “Spirit guided Community.” He writes, “The early Anabaptists came to believe that due to the work of the Holy Spirit and their commitment to each other, followers of Jesus could become Christ-like and behave in a Christ-like way.” “Anabaptist leaders spoke more about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit than did the other reformers of the Reformation. They believed the Holy Spirit empowered them for discipleship, evangelism, peace making, and living the simple life.” “The Anabaptist movement was the evangelistic movement of the sixteenth century.”

So what do we need to know about the Holy Spirit as we lay the foundation for the next 500 years of Church history? There is more information from the Bible than we can digest in one sermon. And I could not find one scripture that gives a complete summary. We know there are lots of ideas about the Holy Spirit, some true and some false. Probably because of worship styles and personal experiences, we all have biases when it comes to the Holy Spirit’s impact & role. The work of the Holy Spirit can be

described with a variety of words and combinations. But here is one list.

First, the Holy Spirit **revitalizes**, restores our lives. He wants to live inside every person who believes in Jesus Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus he had to be born again. Conversion is the most supernatural thing we will ever experience. It is the Holy Spirit who opens our hearts and imparts divine life. Conversion is the most precious and the most powerful force in the world. The Holy Spirit’s power transforms sinners.

Second, the Holy Spirit gives us **power**. People were amazed at the power Jesus had to heal, cast out demons, and his responses to the Jewish religious leaders. It’s hard to believe that this get’s passed on to us. But church history is full of stories of Jesus followers who have healed others, cast out demons, and amazed their tormentors with the power they have displayed. We can be infused with untamable qualities: uncanny boldness, supernatural strength, fierce courage, and an unusual ability to see into the invisible realm of God’s mysteries. We have help to battle sin, in us, in others, and around us.

But I think at times we have begged this wild Spirit of God, that we cannot control, to stay away from us so we can play our tame version of church without His unexpected interruptions. If we are honest, we will admit that at times the church has been so weak, timid, and compromised with the world that we do not even remotely resemble the powerful Christians in the first century, and the early Anabaptists, and others who bravely preached the gospel, worked miracles, and even gave their lives in martyrdom to serve Christ.

Third, the Holy Spirit **guides, leads, and** teaches us. He gives us wisdom. She leads us

into truth. He is our teacher. She is better than GPS, because it's internal guidance. If we are ever confused or can't find our way, the church community and the Holy Spirit's promptings need to line up with the Bible. So as we grow in spiritual maturity we need to learn to discern the Holy Spirit's voice, nudges and priorities. We are given spiritual gifts for living, witness and building the Kingdom of God.

A fourth way the Holy Spirit impacts us is it reminds us and helps us be **united**. The Anabaptist concept of community cannot be underestimated. It just didn't get invented because it sounds good. We live in a world where so many of our stories revolve around the long ranger hero myth. But we don't find this with the early believers, the Apostle Paul or with Jesus himself. The Bible describes a partnership and teamwork between followers of Jesus and between us and God.

The Holy Spirit's Koinonia, which means, joint partnership and one anothering, knits our hearts and binds us together in love and purpose. After the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2, koinonia caused the early disciples to share their possessions unselfishly and to share meals often. Many people decided to become Christians when they witnessed this loving community.

Probably one of the biggest sins of organized church is our lack of unity. It's affected our witness. It's weakened our impact on the world. And it's caused us to deviate from our primary focuses. I have wondered at times, when I watch congregations debate and vote in a democratic or a consensus process, are we talking over the voice of the Holy Spirit? And I've seen the flip side of debate – the silence in meetings that lead to parking lot destructiveness.

But I Corinthians reminds us, “We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink.” (12:13)

Fifth, the Holy Spirit **intercedes** for us. The apostle Paul told us that the Holy Spirit who lives inside us “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). She helps us lament. When we don't know how to think or feel or act, we can trust that the gift of the Holy Spirit to us, is praying and acting on our behalf.

Sixth, the Holy Spirit Is Our **Comforter**. This comes in various ways. Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit and he told his disciples he would send them a Helper. He promised them and us the Holy Spirit would descend on and be in us.

We have been given an amazing gift. When the Spirit came to dwell in us, He brought the eternal life of God. She gives us the very breath of heaven. He infuses us with God's presence. And more than that, She sets up eternal residence in us so we will never feel alone. Followers of Jesus can literally sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in themselves. And as we grow in our faith we learn to hear and respond to His comforting voice.

The Holy Spirit sustains us with hope and supernatural strength. It cheers us up. It gives us miraculous grace to endure. It fights our battles on our behalf. She lifts our heads and mixes gentle correction with encouragement. When we are down we are reminded of God's promises. The role of comforter comes in variety of ways, in just the way we need it in our situations.

The seventh way we are impacted by the Holy Spirit is in the role of **sanctifier** and

refiner. It's not an accident that when the first disciples received the Holy Spirit, it came with wind and fire. In short, the Holy Spirit has the role of cleaning us out, convicting us of guilt and sin. She cleans out our dirt and grime, our resentments, shame, anger, addictive behavior, and all the other things that create distance between us and God, us and each other, and even within ourselves. You could call it our conscious. I Peter, (1) tells us, "You have been chosen in keeping with what God the Father had planned. That happened through the Spirit's work to make you pure and holy." All of us need the power of the Holy Spirit's presence and work in us to make us pure & blameless.

Eighth, the Holy Spirit gives us **peace**. This is a gift Jesus promises to help us overcome fear, discouragement and so on. This is much more than rest and comfort. Romans 8: 6 makes an important contrast. "The thoughts of a person ruled by sin bring death. But the mind ruled by the Spirit brings life and peace." Romans 14:17 points out, "God's kingdom is not about eating or drinking. It is about doing what is right and having joy and peace. All this comes through the Holy Spirit." And I have to mention, "The fruit the Holy Spirit produces is love, joy and peace, along with 6 other fruits." (Gal 5:22) So despite troubles and circumstances, the Holy Spirit empowers us to find real calm and peace.

Ninth, Jesus called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of **truth**. It seems there is a chain of revelation from God the Father to Jesus, from Jesus to the Spirit of Truth, and from the Spirit of Truth to the disciples. So we are assisted as we discern, teach and proclaim the Truth about Jesus. We are guided into the Truth amid the competing religions, philosophies and alternative views of how the world should work. We are promised we find the help we need when issues of truth

are in the public square. The Spirit's presence within us enables us to understand and interpret God's Word. Jesus told His disciples that "when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth."

And tenth, the Holy Spirit always **points to Jesus** as the Son of the Most High God. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus. I Corinthians (12:13) affirms, "So I want you to know that no one who is speaking with the help of God's Spirit says, "May Jesus be cursed." And without the help of the Holy Spirit no one can say, "Jesus is Lord."

There are many other teachings and ways of saying what the impact and role of the Holy Spirit is. But these 10 points make a good summary. Let's allow the Spirit of God to work in us. One of the keys to revival is the work on the Holy Spirit. I'm convinced as I look over church history, that when God's people go bad or become weak, their connection to the Holy Spirit is weak or ignored. And then at some point and in some way, God graciously and mercifully, breaks in by sending upon us a new breath of the Holy Spirit. Often it's scary and threatening, while at the same time, uplifting & exciting. It's more than just emotionalism, with the excitement and passion.

Lastly, it's important to note that our two texts are part of Jesus' last words to his disciples before he was arrested, crucified and raised from the dead. His caring for his followers is clear as he made a point to tell us, "I'm sending someone to help you, in all the ways that have just been described, and more." There is much we don't fully understand, but we can count on Jesus' promise that we have God's power in action and within us, as we depend on the Holy Spirit.