

The Connector

Message #1 in the series "Fresh Wind"

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As we approach a moment in our worship service today to engage with God's Word, I invite you to join me for a moment of prayer.



Heavenly Father, our great Counselor and Healer, we come before you today with our own questions. We lay these at your feet. May your word speak to us; may it provide clarity and light and focus in our lives. Open our eyes, ears and hearts to your word today. May we more purposefully connect with you today. Amen.

I don't know what your feelings are on the matter, but I am very glad to be cresting into a new season. I love summer. The weather is warming up, days are getting a bit longer, and, if you are like me, you are beginning to prepare for some long afternoons and evenings at a pool or lake or waterpark. Summer is a great time of year for us in the Skillen house, and at St. Paul's Church, the Christian calendar is turning over into a new season as well. Coming out of the season of Easter, we now, today, begin the season of Pentecost. On Pentecost Sunday we commemorate the original birthday, if you will, of the Christian Church. To mark this moment not only in the church calendar but also the place we find ourselves in our culture today, we are going to begin a series of sermon conversations on the Holy Spirit that we are calling Fresh Wind. And I can't think of a better image for the changing of seasons. When I think of time outside, I am drawn immediately to the wonderful feeling of a late-spring or early-summer breeze. It refreshes and restores.

The title of our series comes from the references in the original Greek New Testament that refer to the Holy Spirit as *pneuma* which translates, not surprisingly, the wind or breath. Indeed, as we consider the Holy Spirit and the presence it has in our lives, we can begin to think of him as a breath or wind that moves in and through us. Last week, Pastor David concluded our neighborly series that we called "Won't You Be a Neighbor" where we looked to the word of God for direction and inspiration on how we might connect and reconnect with one another. And for the next few weeks we are going to lean into a time together wherein we consider how we connect with God. There is a way to connect to the heart of God. There is a way to discern the voice of God in our daily decisions. There is a way that God personally encourages, equips, inspires, comforts, counsels, and convicts us. There is a way to know that you are never alone in facing what life doles out to you. And there is a way to know that you are loved that you are someone precious. God has made a way. In the Upper Room hours before Jesus was arrested and later crucified, He told His disciples that when He ascended, He would send us the Holy Spirit to be our Connector, our Comforter, our Equipper, our Revealer, and our Power. He would provide a "Fresh Wind."

Here in just a moment we are going to look at two passages of scripture. It is found in John 14, starting at verse 15.



I'll give you a moment to find that passage and while you are navigating there, it is important to note that our timing of this message series beginning on today, Pentecost Sunday is intentional. If you are familiar with the story of Pentecost in Acts 2, you know that as the disciples were gathered, they felt the house they were staying shake, as if they were in an earthquake, and they heard what sounded like a violent wind. They then saw what appeared to be tongues of fire and they began speaking in different languages

as the Spirit enabled them. This encounter with the Holy Spirit happened while Jews from every nation had descended upon Jerusalem. People from different countries and regions had gathered to celebrate Passover. They heard this sound, the sound of a great wind, and went to investigate what had happened. They found the disciples preaching the news of Jesus Christ, the one came save the world from the wages of sin. The Bible in Acts 2 says these people were amazed to hear this word in their own languages because the men speaking were not from their part of the world. That day 3,000 people baptized. Fresh Wind. While there is a meteorological explanation as to why the wind blows or it doesn't, it is boundless and without borders. It fills sails and sweeps across the vastness of an endless prairie. When a wind moves, it is a force.

And when I think of the sheer force we often take for granted of the wind in our atmosphere, I am reminded of the times I would travel from Manhattan, Kansas to Dodge City, Kansas and I would end up catching Highway 50 near Spearville where I would become absolutely mesmerized by the 67 wind turbines that can be seen from the road that generate enough electricity to power 33,000 homes annually. This photo, while very pretty doesn't really capture the spectacle that is the Great Plains Wind Farm. Because the terrain is so flat, and your view of the wind field isn't blocked by trees or mountains, you can actually see for miles and miles as the turbines, rows of them, turning in near synchronicity. I once heard that this sight was selected for the Great Plains wind farm because at this elevation there is a constant wind that at minimum registers at 15 MPH. Every single day. What a powerful way to think about the persistent, boundless, Holy Spirit. The *Pneuma*. The Breath of Life.



In the Christian experience, the Holy Spirit, this Fresh Wind, is the focal point of our relationship with God. Jesus, God's son, was sent to earth to serve as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Closing the gap that exists between us and God. He is the redeemer and to those who call upon him will receive his grace and will be reconciled. The Holy Spirit, is a connector, an advocate, that Jesus speaks about in scripture. It is a constant force moving us closer to God. Closer into relationship with Him.

Our exploration into this deeply important relationship will begin in John 14, starting in verse 15. As we jump in, allow me just a moment to set the scene for you. Jesus is talking to his disciples, his closest friends, his best buds. At the end of John 13, Jesus drops the bombshell that he will be leaving his disciples and where he is going, they cannot follow him. While they are trying to sort out everything that Jesus is telling them, they are troubled, they are grasping at straws, because everything they thought they knew has now been turned on its head. Their Lord, their teacher, their mentor and friend—someone they have been following for a very long time—is leaving, and they didn't know what to say.

At the beginning of chapter 14, Jesus begins with "Let not your hearts be troubled..." But it is clear based on the flurry of questions Jesus fields from his disciples there a lot that is troubling them. Jesus begins by comforting his disciples. Saying that while he is going to Father, there are many rooms in the Father's house, indicating they too would have a place there. Confused, Thomas and Phillip two of the more inquisitive disciples, ask for directions to the father or, at the very least, to see the father. Jesus relays, compassionately, that because they know and love Jesus, they also know and love God. In the plainest words possible, Jesus is trying, patiently, to convey the answers the disciples seem to be looking for are already known because they have known Jesus. All of the mystery around the major transition they are facing into is met with the calm assurance that Jesus provides.

I don't know what the disciples were thinking or feeling in this moment of the story. But I can bet their anxiety and uncertainty are rooted in the fact that they know they won't be personally connected to Jesus forever. He is leaving. And they do not want to be alone.

As a young person I lived between two houses—my dad's house and my mom's house. I liked both places a lot for their own reasons, but on a systematic and rather predictable schedule, I would be at one house for a while and then I would be at another. Leading into every exchange and transition between the two places, I felt a sense of anticipation and excitement while simultaneously feeling a sense of dread. While I was looking forward to seeing the friend group or the different surroundings of the other place, I knew, for a time, that I would miss something significant about the place that I was leaving. The only constant between the two places were my two younger brothers. They carried me from time-to-time as we worked through these many, many transitions in our childhood. They were my anchors.

Jesus was the anchor in the lives of his disciples. They had seen a remarkable world as they followed Jesus; they had been transformed. They left everything they knew as normal and routine to follow Jesus. So here, in this part of the story we find in John's gospel, they are naturally anxious and concerned.

Sensing, perhaps, the anxiety level in the room is growing, Jesus says, calmly in John 14:15-20:

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. [John 14:15-20 NIV].

This is the introduction the disciples first have to the Holy Spirit. And look at the way he zooms into the relationship that Jesus describes in how the Spirit interfaces with us and God.

Verse 17 says,

“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.” [John 14:17 NIV].

The Holy Spirit, or in as it is referenced in this passage the “Spirit of Truth” is the advocate that Jesus is referencing, and I want to unpack that word for just a moment—advocate. Recently, I've engaged in the meaning of advocacy and its remarkable power to bring light into dark and sometimes tense situations. When we think of an advocate, we think of someone who will speak for us, take our case to the powers above us and appeal on our behalf. A good advocate can speak the language of the ones he or she is appealing to and can do so in a convincing manner. That is why when we find ourselves in the legal system, we hire a legal advocate who can help us navigate the altogether far too difficult procedures and nuances of the courts and their related offices. We need an advocate who can speak for us, appeal to judges and rulings, someone who can speak the language and do it convincingly. But advocacy works both ways too. Using the legal system example for just a moment longer, the advocate we hire is also required to communicate back to us, in terms we understand about what is happening in our case and guide us to make better decisions based on all the information available.

Advocacy works both ways.

The Holy Spirit connects us to God, and he connects God to us.

When we come before God in prayer and meditation, when we read the scriptures and open our hearts to receive its messages, we are opening a pathway for the Holy Spirit to operate—to advocate. This connection appears in our lives in a variety of ways.

A couple of weeks ago, following Pastor David's message in which he told his amazing account of hearing the Holy Spirit encouraging him to connect with the man at the checkout counter at a local grocery store, one of my children asked me what it was like to hear God's voice. I mentioned that we hear the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. It may be in a song or a sermon, sure. But it is also that feeling you get when you know you need to stop and help someone, to be a listening ear, to be a helping hand. In each of these experiences, the passive and the active experiences, God is connecting with us through the Holy Spirit and in each case, he is molding us and shaping us for the great calling he has on our lives. Here are just three ways that might happen.

The Holy Spirit teaches us. In a few weeks we are going to hear a message from Aliya on how the Holy Spirit equips us. In that equipping and in many other instances, the Spirit teaches us something new about ourselves and the people and places he sends us. In his teaching, the Spirit reveals his presence in our lives—a presence that is sustaining and persistent. What does the Spirit teach us? Well, I think that varies for every person in every situation. Remember, God is always using every experience to shape us into the people we are called to be. And his Spirit, this Fresh Wind that moves through us and around us is affirming, healing, and anointing. 1 John 2:27 says,

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.” [1 John 2:27 NIV].

The Spirit, as the connector between God and us is going to teach us not about some things, but about all things. And all things mean all things. At first glance that can seem a little odd. We often don't think of the Holy Spirit or God as our teacher. In our lives we will often segment and put our relationship with God in its own corner and we put our jobs or our education or our relationships in the primary spaces. Here's the thing, when we begin to break down the dividers between our spiritual life and our life outside of church, we begin to see how informing our life with Christ can be. The Holy Spirit teaches us about all things.

The Holy Spirit guides us. When we feel lost or isolated, or we simply don't know where to go, the Spirit guides us. Just as the Spirit can teach us about all things, the Holy Spirit knows all things. No matter where you find yourself, no matter what you may be facing into, we have a guide who connects us to the very heart of God. As I referenced earlier, there are several great examples of this characteristic of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. Acts captures the stories of the disciples after Jesus leaves, and they take his message to different parts of the world. In Acts 8 Phillip is guided by the Holy Spirit to disciple a man, an Ethiopian official, who is reading the account of the Prophet Isaiah, but it is clear he doesn't completely understand what he is reading. The Holy Spirit tells Phillip to follow this man, and through their conversation the Ethiopian official asks to be baptized, and Phillip baptizes him. It is a moment that is completely authored by the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever put your direction in the hands of God? Have you ever, on a whim or a nudge of the Holy Spirit augmented your commute or changed up your routine because... well... something inside you suggested you should. I'd be willing to get that if you have, you've probably experienced something memorable and maybe even unexplainable. And like Phillip, you may have been guided by the Holy Spirit in that moment.

When we begin to tune our hearts and ears to the Spirit, we begin to transform. By listening and following the Holy Spirit our lives begin to change. That transformation is a refining process.

The Holy Spirit refines us. When we develop this deeply important relationship with God through his Holy Spirit, we are inviting in the great refiner. Matthew 3:12 says,

“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
[Matthew 3:12 NIV].

Just as the grain farmer stores up the wheat, the very fruit of his labor, and burns the chaff, the invasive weeds that can dilute the value of the prize crop that he holds so dear, God refines the treasure in you and burns all that might distract and dilute that which is good.

God sees treasure in you. He sees the greatest possible outcome in you. I know you might be thinking, “But Pastor Matt, you don’t know what I’ve done.” I know. But God does and he sees the greatest possibilities in you. How do I know? In his great infinite nature God looked upon His creation and saw everyone and everything. He saw every great war; He saw poverty and worship. He saw death and life; He saw the greatest pain and joy. He saw you and He saw me. He then sent His only son, Jesus. To live and die so that we would be free from our sins. He saw the greatest in you because you are worth it.

Because he sees the greatest in us His Spirit is always refining us. The fire that burns away the chaff is an unquenchable fire.

Unquenchable.

In being refined, we are being forged and shaped and formed in God’s image. Advocacy works both ways. Our advocate appeals for us to God but also appeals to us from God. As we pray to God to move in our lives, the Spirit spurs us on to go deeper into the wilderness, to find the places that so desperately need light, and to shine.

Let us shine. For we are connected to the great creator.