

## **Week 4            *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, ... of one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church***

(Note: This is a lengthy study and it may be best to do it over two sessions)

**Prayer: Spirit of God, bless us** by Desiderius Erasmus, (1467-1536, Dutch Renaissance humanist & Catholic priest)

Spirit of God, with your holy breath  
you cleanse the hearts and minds of your people;  
you comfort them when they are in sorrow,  
you lead them when they wander from the way,  
you knit them together when they are in conflict,  
and you bless them with many and various gifts.

We pray that you would daily increase  
the gifts that you have entrusted to us;  
that with your light before us and within us  
we may pass through this world  
without stumbling or straying.  
Amen.

(<https://prayerandverse.com/2019/06/20/spirit-of-god-bless-us/>)

### **Video:**

Although it is not necessary to watch the short video it gives a short introduction to the context of the study. It is available at: <https://ourcommonlife.org.au/22-june-2020/>.

### **Introduction:**

A common question is *how* do we experience the Holy Spirit?

- *How, where* does the Holy Spirit touch my life?
- *What* does the Holy Spirit do, how does the Holy Spirit work in the world?
- *Where* can we witness, see evidence of the Holy Spirit's work?
- *Where* does the Holy Spirit create, bring life, as we confess?

The remarkable answer is: In the Church! The Holy Spirit, creates, gives life to the church – the one holy catholic apostolic church! The Holy Spirit calls, draws, gathers, redeems, reconciles, protects, shelters comforts, cares, leads a church! This is the ancient confession of the Nicene Creed: *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, ... of one holy catholic apostolic Church* (also that of the Apostle's Creed - *We believe in ... the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints*”).

This is evident in the Bible; particularly in the New Testament after Pentecost:

**Acts:** The Acts of the Apostles, often also called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, tells of how the church is created, grows and is led by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (cf Acts 4:8, 25, 31; 6:3, 5; 9:17, 31; 10:44-45; 11:24, 28; 13:4, 9, 52; 16:6; 21:4).

**Johannine writings:** The author of the Gospel of John and the Johannine epistles tells of how the Holy Spirit, the *Parakletos* is the one who teaches, comforts and leads

the new community of faith bound in and by light and love (cf Johannine texts in earlier studies).

**Petrine writings:** The author of the epistles of Peter narrate how a new community is formed, by the Holy Spirit, from scattered strangers and aliens into a spiritual household, God's elect, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 1:2, 11-12; 4:14).

**Pauline Writings:** Paul continually writes about the Holy Spirit forming and leading the church, especially too in the primary letter of the church, to the church, about the church – **Ephesians:**

- The mystery of the origin of the church in God's gracious election (1:3-14) (esp 1:3, 13-14);
- The key role of the church in the whole cosmos (1:15-23)(esp 1:17);
- The unknown and unpredictable unity of the church, achieved through the breaking down of walls of division (2:11-22) (esp 2:22);
- The immeasurable love of Christ gifted through the Spirit to the church (3:14-21)(esp 3:16);
- The new unity of the Spirit in Christ, of all saints, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters (4:3-5);
- To make the church become visible in the world (4:1-16).

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-13:3, 14:1** (also 1 Corinthians 14:1-39)

In the Pauline epistles to the congregation at Corinth the creative moulding work of the Holy Spirit is also evident.

**Diverse and divisive congregation:** It is clear that the congregation at Corinth was struggling with diversity in class, social standing, economic wealth, and ethnicity. Persons who would usually, in the normal course of their daily lives, not have much to do with one another, were being called to be one in Christ [for example, different cultures in drinking and eating (chap 10), the wealthy excluding the poor from the Lord's Supper Communion (chap11)].

It is in this context, amongst this unlikely, divided and diverse community that the Holy Spirit builds a church of unity in Christ (11:18;12:3) through numerous gifts and different services, different kinds of workings but the same God, the one Spirit, the one Lord, Jesus Christ (12:4-5). This is the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Common good:** The manifestation of Holy Spirit, through different gifts, is not in the first place given for personal gratification and experience, but for the common good (vs 7, 8-11). This is clearly illustrated through the metaphor of the body, with many parts (vs 12-31).

**1 Corinthians 12:13** states profoundly, clearly that we were *all* (Jew/Greek, slave/free baptised by *one Spirit* into *one body* and we are *all* given *one Spirit* to drink.

The Holy Spirit unites, makes us one – not identical, not the same, but one. Also not the same in our spiritual life and experiences. No one becomes the norm for another. No one is compared with another. No one is measured against another. Each one is different, but one in the Spirit, one in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit creates *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*. This is the first visible and experiential fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is Lord, and gives life.

**One:** We are one. This is the deep, fundamental, core nature of the Church. The Holy Spirit creates *koinonia*. Community. Solidarity. This we experience in the support and care for one another; in the upliftment and encouragement of one another; in the acceptance of one another. The belonging together. Not uniformity, but unity. Not competition, but complimentary.

This is the unity Christ passionately prayed for in John 17. It is *the one* we become against all human-odds-and differences within the Church; and the unity which is witnessed in amazement by those outside the church,

**Holy:** Separate. Elect. So the church can be true and faithful to the gospel through our teaching, our worship, and our witness. Holy through our lifestyle and our behaviour because we have been transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

**Catholic:** Universal. Complete. Not only in part, but in whole. Not only with regard to this doctrine, or that teaching, but in whole. Not only with regard to part of this denomination, or this language, but the whole Church. Not only with regard to parts of our lives, but in full. Universal.

**Apostolic.** Christian. The church of Christ. Because the church of the apostles, is the church of Christ. The Church that is recognised in the scarred hands and feet of the risen Christ. Not any association or modern Church with its own interests and interpretations. A church testifying the Gospel – the same Gospel of grace and truth, of hope and love proclaimed by the apostles.

This is the essence of the confession the Nicene Creed about the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. The Holy Spirit creates and gives life to the church, the community of saints, in *koinonia*, bound together by faith, hope and love. This is the first visible and tangible sign of the work of the Holy Spirit – the church - so that others can see, experience and believe.

### Reflections:

- Give practical examples
  - from the community in Corinth;
  - from you own experience in congregationsof the unifying work, *koinonia*, established by the Holy Spirit in Corinth/a congregation.
- What do you think is the gift you have received from the Holy Spirit (cf too Romans 12:1-8); and
- In what way do you use it for the common good of the Church?

### Closing prayer:

**Hymn:** *The Church's one foundation*, the well known and loved hymn was written by SJ Stone (a priest, poet and hymnist), ironically in response to the Anglican church in South Africa) experiencing divisions after the controversial theological views of Bishop John Colenso of Natal in the 1860 - 1870's.

Stone wrote 12 hymns based on the 12 articles of the Apostle's Creed. *The Church's one foundation* is based on the 9<sup>th</sup> creed: "*We believe in ... the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints*".

A lovely acapella version is available at: <https://youtu.be/rq1r9mQEZPA>.