John 14: 15-31

There is a flow to John 14 that is easy to miss when we break it into portions, so it requires some attention as to what has preceded in the gospel of previous weeks, in order to understand what follows.

We have heard that the disciples were gathered with Jesus at the table that Passover evening listening to his words of good-bye. At the time Jesus was acutely aware of his imminent arrest, and he set forth an even larger significant prediction of his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

This impending absence and separation of the disciples and Jesus was a disturbing prospect and the morale of the disciples quickly fell to a low point. Furthermore, what were they supposed to think of Jesus’ prediction, not only of his own death, but that one of them would betray him, and another deny him?

So, Jesus addressed the pastoral needs of the disciples and their prospective dodgy situation in the future, by promising a miraculous gift from God, the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit who leads into all truth”.

We know the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy spirit. We even have a Trinity Sunday. But just what exactly is the Holy Spirit? God is manifested as that Holy Spirit, within Jesus for all his earthly life, bringing counsel, power, peace, love, and joy. So, Jesus promised them, and us, a permanence of the divine presence, the living spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who will in future be within us all. This living spirit of God will act as a guide and Advocate for us in times of trouble and need, educate, nurture and counsel us, listen intently to us, and respond to our joys and sorrows, if we continue to love Jesus and follow his teachings.

As we contemplate the abundance from God, including all our material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual gifts, we could never receive anything that compares to the gift of a living God dwelling among us. We know that the spirit has been with Jesus all his earthly life and before, and now Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit, will come to us and never leave us. Nothing could give us more hope.

Eventually Jesus delivered on his promise by breathing the Holy Spirit into the disciples. This is covered extensively in the book of in Acts. Acts was understood to be written by Luke, who in both his gospel and Acts wrote the most about Jesus and the beginnings of Christian faith.

But here is the conundrum: How can we trust that the Holy Spirit will be with us always and lead us into all truth? What evidence do we have in our own lives, or see in the experience of others, that assures us the Spirit of God is alive and abides with us morning, noon, and night? In what ways have we seen the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the world?

Think of the experiences you have had with the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit has nurtured and guided you to be more Christlike. Do you open yourself daily to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit? Are you open and willing to listen daily to the truth spoken to you by God’s spirit within you?

If we look for the Holy Spirit to work in a human way, we are likely to be disappointed, because we will miss much of what the Spirit is saying and doing. Jesus warned that because most of the world was not looking for the Holy Spirit, people would not recognise it, but that we could know the Spirit because it lives within us, if only we choose to acknowledge its presence.

What personal environment within us offers the most productive home for God to work powerfully in our lives? We know that Jesus lived to bring glory to the Father. We too should work to bring glory to the Father, and then we can trust that the Holy Spirit is living and working within us. Our faith is the relationship with the living Christ and the living God who sent him, all guided by our willingness to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

That Spirit, sent from God, working within us, giving us gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Where these gifts flourish, the Spirit of God is present and working. We should also be aware that God’s Spirit can be active anywhere, and in many circumstances, and is always devoted to hope, reconciliation, and freedom.

On the one hand, some people equate the work of the Holy Spirit with a particular kind of experience, such as excitement in worship. Alternatively, we may feel content with a kind of vague spirituality with a sense that perhaps there is something “out there” that we cannot name.

Consider also that the Spirit can be mysterious and full of surprises. We do not control the Spirit; we only pray that the Spirit will choose us as partners in God’s mighty deeds. Interestingly, the various arts you see in our churches portray episodes from Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. But the Holy Spirit is much more challenging to portray. The Spirit’s dove may hover above Jesus on stained glass windows, but that is usually the closest we are shown as a manifestation of God’s representative within us.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit appears in multiple forms, such as wind, flame, a dove, pillars of clouds and fire. The spirit hovered over Mary, descended as a dove at Jesus’ baptism, drove Jesus into the desert to be tempted, and appeared in flames to the disciples at Pentecost.

Today the Spirit manifests God in many ways in our own lives. It could be some unanticipated function of unprompted generosity, or something that has nurtured and guided us when we needed it most. Just think of the experiences you may have had with the Holy Spirit. Through the influence of the Holy Spirit, you may well have experienced a situation where something within you has steeled your resolve and influenced a decision you once made. I know it can be private and personal, but think back, have you ever been touched by the Spirit of God? Many of us believe that we have.

Amen