



# HOLY SPIRIT

The Third Person of the Trinity is the most mysterious. Even Jesus said the Spirit blows where He will and can't be seen easily. But the Holy Spirit is also God at His most present to us—even inside of us. He is constantly at work in the world, in the church and in people to change things for the good. If you want to see God's power in your life, look for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

## HOLY SPIRIT • Acts 2:36–47 • Greg Hartnett • June 30, 2019

My name is Greg Hartnett and I am on staff here at First Pres as a “pastor-in-training.” I’m two-thirds of the way through a three-year apprenticeship program where I finish up my seminary work and shadow some of our pastors. When my wife and I moved here a few years ago, we bought a house. And we did the trendy, millennial thing and bought an older house near downtown that was a bit of a “fixer upper.” So, in the last two years, we’ve done a ton of painting, I’ve re-tiled both of our bathrooms, we’ve replaced drywall and countertops, we’ve brought countless truckloads of yard-waste to Rocky Top Resources, and I’m really proud of all of that. So, this morning I wanted to take a few minutes to show you (before and after photos of) just a couple of the projects we’ve worked on the last two years. Isn’t it just so satisfying to see a “before” and “after?” There’s something about complete transformation that is compelling, right? This is why the nation went crazy for shows like “The Biggest Loser” and “Fixer Upper” a few years ago, or why those episodes of daytime talk shows where people get dramatic makeovers are so popular. There’s something in us that is inspired by these sorts of transformations. And, really, I think we’re drawn to these types of stories because we find ourselves longing for these sorts of transformations for ourselves.

We are in the final week of our *Holy Spirit* series, and our passage this morning reveals another “total transformation.” You may remember from the last few weeks that one of the followers of Jesus, Peter, has been preaching a sermon to the masses at the Jewish festival of Pentecost. He speaks a lot about how Jesus is the fulfillment of the ancient Hebrew scriptures and prophecies, which brings us to our passage for today: Acts 2:36–47. Peter wraps up this first Christian sermon with these words in verse 36, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). There are some incredibly loaded words in this verse. So let’s start with the less familiar term for us... Jesus is Messiah. In Greek this is *christos*, which is where we get the term “Christ.” Many people think that “Christ” is Jesus’s last name, but it is actually a theologically significant word that means Messiah or “The Anointed One.” Peter’s Jewish audience would have been well acquainted with this term. It referred to a royal figure who would play a crucial role in the final days. In choosing to use this term, Peter is telling the people, “You know that king who is supposed to rise up to save Israel, the king whom you have been waiting for? Jesus is that anointed one... Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and you just executed him.” Ouch.

Peter also says, “Jesus is Lord.” This is actually one of the earliest creeds of the Church. You see, “Lord” is not just the ruler of a region or a term of respect, but actually refers to the God of Israel Himself. In the statement, “Jesus is Lord,” Peter is affirming the divinity of Jesus. He is looking his fellow Jews squarely in the eye and saying, “The God I’ve been talking about this whole morning, the God you and I grew up worshipping in the temple, it turns out that Jesus is God! Jesus is Lord! And, you just crucified him.” Peter calls out the people and, understandably, they have a visceral reaction. Verse 37 says, “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). So, let’s think about this as our “before” picture. Remember, we’re looking for total transformation here. On the “before” side of the equation we have a picture that we could title: “People who didn’t recognize Jesus for who He was, and played some kind of role in his execution.” And now, thanks to Peter, they are aware of it. They know that something is not right with this picture. They know that they are not the good religious people that

they thought they were. They have been awakened to a new reality, and they cannot ignore it. And it is precisely at this point that we begin to see the handiwork of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit awakens people to their brokenness and deep need for a redeemer and, ultimately, moves people to faith in Christ.

So, the people ask, “What shall we do?” and Peter’s a good guy, he doesn’t leave them hanging. He responds by saying, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). “Repent” is not a word that gets a lot of airtime in our world today. This is another unfamiliar term for us. In the New Testament, repentance especially involved a changing of one’s mind, which then leads to a change in one’s actions. Scholar F.F. Bruce called repentance a “spiritual about-face.” As I’d mentioned, we’ve done a lot of work in our house over the last couple of years, but what I didn’t mention is that we are completely inexperienced. I worked a summer for a tiling company, but my job was just to demolish things; I don’t really know how to put them back together. So, last year, we’d been renovating, and watching a lot of YouTube videos along the way, and I started to feel pretty confident—until it came time to install a new bathtub. I was *really* struggling to get the new drain to match up with where the old drain was, and my wife said multiple times, “We should call a plumber.” But, as I mentioned, I’d watched YouTube and was feeling pretty confident by now. It wasn’t until I’d flooded the upstairs bathroom and downstairs ceiling *three times* that I realized the error of my ways, my inability to properly seat the tub drain and, with my tail between my legs, I apologized to my wife and started googling plumbers. That’s a form of repentance. This is what Peter calls the people to on a spiritual level.

Peter also calls the people to be baptized. This is not a new instruction. Peter didn’t invent baptism. The Jewish people had actually been practicing baptism for a long time. Throughout the Jewish scriptures there are instructions for priests and others to go through a ritual cleansing with water. Additionally, baptism was part of the process by which a non-Jewish person would convert to Judaism. It has always been part of a person’s entry into new life, and initiation into God’s people. But most important for us today is to recognize that the Holy Spirit is the one primarily at work in baptism. Not only do the gospels describe the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on Jesus at his baptism, but the Spirit is consistently at work in people to make forgiveness, repentance and profession of faith possible. It is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to bring us out of spiritual death and into spiritual life, and baptism is a physical sign by which we recognize these spiritual realities. Here at First Pres we typically sprinkle water on the person being baptized for a variety of reasons. But other times, people are completely submerged or immersed in water for baptism (When we do that, we just call up our friends at First Baptist and find a time that works to head across the street!). One of the cool things about immersion is that we witness a person going into water with their old life, and then being raised, sopping wet, into a new life with Jesus and into a new community and family of faith. There is a parallel of going down into a watery grave and being raised back up to new life. While this is a great image, ultimately the method of baptism is not the most important aspect of this. What we need to see this morning is that when the Holy Spirit enters a person’s life, it is like a total immersion. A comprehensive renovation. A complete transformation. There is no aspect of that person’s life which goes untouched.



Peter promises his audience that faith in Christ, repentance and baptism will be accompanied by the “gift of the Holy Spirit.” Now, if you’re listening closely, you’ll remember that we’ve seen that the Holy Spirit was already at work in the people when they were “cut to the heart,” but Peter also describes the Holy Spirit being received as a gift. You see, when we come to faith in Christ, when we repent and enter the community of faith, we experience God in a new way. We become filled with God’s very presence, and we experience a type of freedom and joy that was previously incomprehensible. But it’s also important to note that this is not a formula or prescribed order of operations. In other places in the book of Acts we see repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit coming in varying orders, but regardless of the order, we consistently see people finding forgiveness in Christ and experiencing true and rich life in the Holy Spirit. And with this, Peter has further good news. The promise of verse 38, to receive the Holy Spirit, is not limited to those in attendance that day. Peter says in 39, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). Very early in the Bible (Genesis 17), God made a covenant with a man named Abraham. As part of the entry into this promise, God called Abraham to circumcise his male descendants shortly after they were born. This was to be the rite through which they were ingrafted into the promises of God. Similarly, we Presbyterians look to passages like this one and see an invitation to baptize children. Obviously, an infant cannot repent and decide to follow Jesus; we understand baptism to be a proclamation that a child is being claimed as a member of the covenant community. This child will still need to express their faith in Jesus later in life, but the work of sealing the child to God’s promise is accomplished by the Holy Spirit long before the child can articulate their faith.

So, Peter goes on, and in verse 40, “With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!’” (Acts 2:40). And what happened? The crowd responded! In verse 41: “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:41). This is incredible! Like a Billy Graham crusade! But then things really get interesting. We begin to see what it looks like when people have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:42-47a). All of this is evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and in their community. People are gathering daily around the Scriptures and are committed to learning more and more from those who walked with Jesus. They are moved to fellowship. This is not “sipping coffee and eating a donut-hole in the plaza” fellowship. This is something deeper. This is walking through life together. Supporting one another. Supplying for each other’s needs. Laughing together. Weeping with one another. Many of you have experienced this type of fellowship in a Sunday AM community or a Life Group! We have been hearing stories recently from our life groups about people making meals for one another during challenging times. People in life groups committing to drive one another places because someone is without a car. We’ve heard of people finding friendship and community in Life Groups after having lost a spouse. This is the type of selfless,

life-on-life fellowship that occurs when the Holy Spirit is at work. They committed to breaking bread. This refers to the Lord’s Supper. They practiced the sacrament together and were spiritually nourished in this way. And they committed to prayer. Again, we’ve heard a lot of stories about people praying meaningfully for one another in our Life Groups, but this also involved more formal prayer. They were praying through the Psalms, praying the Lord’s prayer, and pursuing these things with intentionality. Here we get a taste of what the Spirit can do in Christian community! Now, if you look around, you may be quick to point out that the early church didn’t look a lot like First Pres (there’s no mention of a choir or band) but that doesn’t mean the way we gather at First Pres is unbiblical or wrong (we see various expressions of the church throughout the New Testament). It just reinforces the fact that you *must* get plugged-in to some sort of life group or small community where this sort of stuff flourishes! We also see that the believers held everything in common, and this is remarkable! Verse 45 says, “They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” These verses often result in a series of questions like, “Does following Jesus mean I’m supposed to sell all my possessions and give everything to the church?” “Is this supposed to make me feel guilty about going on vacations/enjoying retirement?” “If I’m not called to sell everything I own, how am I supposed to utilize my resources?” Really, today, from this platform, I can’t answer all of these questions for you. The kind of sacrifice and generosity described in this passage is an example of what happened when the Holy Spirit began to move in this early community. And we have seen similar expressions of this type of generosity and communal life here at First Pres, but this is not necessarily prescriptive. To discern this, once again, you need to be in a small community that can help speak Scripture into your life and be listening for what God might be calling you to. However, in response to those questions, I can say this: As we submit to God’s Spirit, our desires begin to change. The Holy Spirit reforms our heart so that we actually begin to desire what God desires. When this happens, there is no telling what God will do with your life, your time, your money, your property, your vehicle, your stock portfolio, etc. Again, when the Holy Spirit enters a person’s life, it is a total immersion. A comprehensive renovation. A complete transformation. There is no aspect of that person’s life which goes untouched.

So, we come to the last lines of the passage which tell us that, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46b-47). We saw the “before” photo of the crowds at Pentecost. They were mocking the disciples, and then Peter stood up to explain to them who Jesus was. Here is the “after” picture: A thriving community so centered on Jesus that they are willing to give sacrificially in order to care for one another. But how did this happen!? When it comes to my backyard and my bathroom floors, the transforming power is me: my sweat, my elbow grease—and my father-in-law’s, but today I’m taking the credit. But when it comes to a transformed life, or a transformed community, it is only the Holy Spirit who can bring us into the type of wholeness that Pastor Tim talked about three weeks ago and that we see here in our passage today. Many of you here today can attest to this. You know God in this way and have received the gift of the Spirit. You can tell stories about how the Spirit led you to something new that you would never have pursued on your own. You can testify to the way your life has been transformed. You can talk about a struggle with an addiction, a change in character, a healed relationship, and you know that it is only through the trans-

formative power of the Holy Spirit that these things have come to fruition! But many of you have not experienced this. Many of you don't know the Lord in this way. Many of you have refused the type of transformation and freedom that the Spirit offers. You are missing the love, joy, and peace of Jesus Christ. And to you I say, "The same invitation that Peter extended in that sermon nearly 2,000 years ago is also before you today." You see, at the beginning of our passage, Peter said, "...God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36b). Scholars are quick to remind us that the phrase "whom you crucified" does not promote anti-Semitism. It's not really just the Jews who landed Jesus on a cross. Rather, Peter speaks to the greater truth that Christ went to the cross for *our* sin. For your sin, and for my sin. You see, each one of us has broken God's law. Each one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Each one of us is unable to put ourselves in right relationship with God, to restore ourselves. We are completely dependent on someone else to do that for us, and, really, the only one who can accomplish such a thing is God Himself. But the good news is that while we were still sinners, Christ died to restore us (Romans 5:8). So, all who proclaim, "Jesus is Lord" and believe that God raised him from the dead will be saved (Romans 10:9-10).

And so, I plead with you today, do not miss this invitation. Do not miss the opportunity to acknowledge your need for a savior and to receive the Holy Spirit who has *already* been at work in you. Do not miss the opportunity to open yourself up to transformation, to open yourself up to new life in Christ. Repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! This is so important that we are going to take time right now to pray together, and I invite you to declare faith in Christ through this prayer. Maybe today the Holy Spirit has moved something in you and you are ready to respond to Jesus for the very first time. To allow the Spirit to begin a transforming work in your life. Or maybe you have responded to this invitation to faith in Jesus before, but you've wandered away and need an excuse to return to Him. This is a chance to do that. Either way, you have an opportunity right now to invite the Holy Spirit to move in your life in a fresh way. So, let's pray together. I'm going to pray a sentence and then all of us will echo that line.

*Lord my God,  
With an open heart I pray,  
Thank you for sending Jesus to be my Savior,  
I declare him to be Lord and Messiah,  
I believe he died and rose again.  
I give you my life.  
Stir up new faith in me through your Holy Spirit,  
That I can follow and trust in all you are.  
In Jesus' name.  
Amen.*

If you just prayed that prayer for the first time, if you have not already been, you should be baptized! If you were baptized as a baby or a kid, rejoice! For the Holy Spirit has continued to work in your life since that time, and you have finally lived into the truth, the hope of your baptism. The Holy Spirit is the one who stirs up faith and new life in us. The Holy Spirit is the one who leads us to total immersion, comprehensive renovation, complete transformation. So, as we leave today, may we go with the grace of Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father, and the transforming power and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

## STUDY GUIDE

### HOLY SPIRIT • "Baptizer"

#### Acts 2:36-47

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Acts 2:36-47.

- 1) Reread verse 36. What do the terms Lord and Messiah mean? Do they mean something different now than they did then?
- 2) Reread verse 37. What stands out to you about the people's response to Peter?
- 3) Reread verse 38. Peter recommends the people first repent, then be baptized, and finally receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Does this mirror your experience? What about these instructions are prescriptive for all people (and us today)?
- 4) Reread verses 42-47. How does this align with your experience of "church?" How does this align with the experience of your life group?
- 5) What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from this passage?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Reread verses 41 and 47. The early church saw large numbers of people coming to faith in Christ. This was certainly the work of the Holy Spirit, but they were participants in this work! Take time to pray for the Holy Spirit to add to our number today. Consider how the Lord may be inviting you to join in this work.

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

As we wrap up this *Holy Spirit* series, once again close with this ancient prayer of the church:

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.  
And kindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.  
And you will renew the face of the earth.  
Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit  
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.  
In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right  
and always rejoice in your consolation.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*