

## Welcome

This might shock you, but in my early days as a pastor, I was something of a nightmare. I preached my first sermon when I was 16, and it was at my grandma's church. I was so proud of myself... until I got to the end of my notes and realized I didn't have a conclusion. I had no idea what to say next, so I just looked at everyone, announced, "Well, that's the end of my notes!", and walked off the platform. My first job was in youth ministry, and - to put it kindly - I was not a good teacher. I remember sitting down with my group of six teenagers for my first Bible study. It was a lesson on the Trinity because you have to start with the important stuff. And I remember about three-fourths of the way through the lesson looking at their glassy eyes and realizing I had lost them. They couldn't care less.

It wasn't just that I was a bad teacher though. I was also a brash, judgmental person. I had started blogging in college, and I enjoyed nothing more than writing witty, cruel takedowns of people I disagreed with. It's a dangerous thing, to be young and positioned as the voice of God. I had this little self-made pedestal from which I could look down on everyone and keep them in line.

If you can't tell, I'm not proud of those early days. The bad sermons and bad lessons were one thing - everyone starts somewhere. But the bad character was something else. I was a cruel person.

In case you think I'm exaggerating, I actually almost got fired for the way I wrote online. Maybe two or three years into my ministry, my senior pastor sat me down and went through several of my more outrageous posts with me. He explained to me why the way I was conducting myself wasn't acceptable. He told me that some in leadership thought I should be fired. But he had advocated to keep me on. He told me I was young, that I had some growing up to do.

In the moment, of course, I didn't listen. I was filled with righteous indignation because HOW DARE HE? How dare ANYONE? But I really wanted to keep my job, so I toned it down.

And of course today, I realize he was right. I have grown up quite a lot from those days. I do write and act and think differently. I've changed.

Today, I want to talk about change. How we change. But more importantly, how we help *others* change. Because the reality is, you and I can't change anyone (even ourselves). We are changed when the Holy Spirit changes us, when God transforms us from the inside out.

What we *can* do is what my pastor did for me: provide a safe place for people to change. We're going to talk about the idea of holding space today. And here's why: we know that God is the one who transforms us - specifically through the power of the Holy Spirit. So we'll talk about what God does and what we do.

## Message

This summer, we're working through the Apostle's Creed, one of the oldest statements about what Christians believe. These believes are not gateways to belonging but invitations to life. When we say, "I

believe..." we are acting in faith, trusting the wisdom of the Church across the world and throughout time that has found these words to be the Way of God, the way to life.

We began by confessing God as our creator, insisting that our lives have meaning and purpose. Since then, we've been investigating belief in Jesus - everything from his identity as God to his incarnation to his second coming.

Today, we're we begin the final part of the Creed, the piece that focuses on God the Holy Spirit: **I believe in the Holy Spirit.**

For the rest of the series, we're talking about how we live between now and the Second Coming. And the answer, again and again, is that we live as God's people through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Church I grew up in didn't talk about the Holy Spirit much. We understood God the Father, on the throne of Heaven. And we really loved Jesus, God the Son, who came to earth and died for us.

But we didn't know what to do with the Holy Spirit. And the longer I've been a pastor, the more I realize this is pretty common. So today, we talk about who the Holy Spirit is, and what it means to believe in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, which means that the Holy Spirit is personal (like the Father and the Son), and the Holy Spirit is fully, equally God. Everything that's true of the Father and the Son is true of the Spirit.

If you were here a couple of weeks ago, when Sue preached on Jesus' resurrection, you know that the Spirit is the power by which the Father raised Jesus from the dead. And the first Christians understood that the Spirit gave them this same resurrection power. In fact, the Spirit is the one who empowers us to be transformed, the one who enables us to live lives free of death.

This is important: the one who gives us victory over sin is the Spirit. This is why faith can never be a self-help program. Because apart from the Spirit, we are powerless to change. Only the Spirit transforms us.

[**Scripture Slide 1**] Jesus talks *a lot* about the Holy Spirit in John's gospel. Turn to John 16 with me. This is during Jesus' farewell discourse - the final words he shares with his followers before he is arrested and crucified. Even though he is leaving them, Jesus promises they won't be alone. That actually, his departure is a *good* thing:

**Now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is**

that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.' -- John 16:5-15

Jesus promises to send an Advocate - this is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit convicts the world of Sin, demonstrates God's way of righteousness. The Spirit guides Jesus' followers into truth.

It can be difficult to see why it's good Jesus returned to Heaven. But Jesus points out that, while he is a human, embodied, he can only be in one place, among the disciples. The Spirit, however, lives in each of us, pointing out our Sin, giving us the power to overcome it, and making us into images of Jesus.

Jesus sent us the Spirit. The Spirit convicts us of Sin. The Spirit gives us the power of the resurrection. The Spirit transforms us.

All too often, we take it upon ourselves to do the Spirit's job, to assume command of pointing out other people's sin and telling them what to do about it. We assume it's our job to make people change.

But there's nowhere in Scripture that indicates that's the case. Quite the opposite: again and again, the Scriptures insist it is only by God's own power we are rescued, transformed and saved.

We have to stop trying to do the Spirit's job, and focus on what we're called to do.

What is that, exactly?

It's not "nothing". That's how it can *feel*, when we say that we trust the Spirit to do what the Spirit promises to do. If we believe the Spirit is the one who transforms, then the best thing we can do is what counselors call "holding space".

Holding Space means that we create space for people to feel safe enough to open themselves up to the Spirit. Holding space is hard because there's a real limit to what you can do. When we commit to hold space, we're committing to protecting someone, and not assert control over them. What does holding space look like?

First, it looks like trusting the person. I've never met someone who didn't understand sin in a pretty basic way. As Debbie talked about in her week, we all know when we miss the mark. That's wired into our DNA - God made us for life, and we know when we're not living it. And the Spirit guides us to identify our sin and confess it, so we don't need to point out sin... we trust the Spirit.

Second, it looks like being patient. A bad marriage isn't saved overnight. A substance abuse problem isn't fixed with one prayer. A bad temper doesn't disappear after a single conversation. We have to be patient with those for whom we're holding space. Help them take the *next right step*, not insist they be five miles down the road instantaneously.

Third, we have to keep our own egos in check. Saving someone else is not our job. We are a partner in their journey of faith, not their master Yoda. We can't make their decisions for them. We have to keep ourselves in check. When they ask for our advice, we have to offer it with humility and kindness, not judgment and condemnation.

Finally, we have to focus on being safe. Can we provide unconditional love? Can they fail and still feel safe?

If we can do these things, we can hold space for people to encounter God and be transformed. But here's the scary thing: we still don't get to make the call. We still have to trust that the Spirit is going to change them, and we don't get a say in what that process looks like. We're called to walk with them, not plot their path.

The unpredictability of the Spirit is something Jesus warns us about in John 3. Speaking about the new life the Spirit brings, he says,

I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit. -- John 3:5-8

The Spirit blows like the wind, unpredictable and in some ways unknowable. This is because the Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. God doesn't owe us an explanation or a timeline.

Rather, because the Spirit is God, we can trust that, while we cannot predict the Spirit's work, we can trust the Spirit to work. Because God is trustworthy, the Spirit is trustworthy. Because God is faithful, the Spirit is faithful.

This is what I learned from that first pastor, who held space for me to grow. Over the next several years, I grew a lot in how I write and think and behave particularly in online spaces. Of course I am still not perfect, but I have learned a lot about how to be fully human even on blogs and facebook and other online spaces, how even in those places I am to be an image of God.

I wouldn't have grown like that if I hadn't had a leader who was patient with me, who was willing to hold space while the Spirit continued to work in my life. I am the pastor I am today, the person I am today, because someone held space for me.

And I'm continuing to grow, to learn to look more like Jesus, because people continue to hold space for me.

The Spirit is still working on me. And Catalyst is a space where I know I can be myself, where I can be honestly me, so the Spirit can continue her wild, gentle, insistent, unpredictable, very good work of making me new.

So what does it mean to say, We believe in the Holy Spirit?

It means we believe there is a difference between life and death.

It means we believe God's Spirit raised Jesus from the dead at the beginning of the new world of life.

It means we believe that we cannot work hard enough or be good enough to earn this new life. Only the Spirit can give us this life.

It means we know we are not in control of our own transformation, or of how the Spirit works in the lives of others. We're not the judge or the jury. We are the Spirit's people.

It means we're committed to holding space for people to encounter the Spirit because we truly believe only the Spirit can give us life, and because we're not in control.

To be a Spirit-filled community means we're the most loving, the safest place to be. And it means we're the place where life is exploding forth, making us new, making all things new.

It means we wait on the Spirit. We trust that, though we cannot predict what the Spirit will do, we know the work is good because the Spirit is God and God is faithful, trustworthy and true.

### **Communion + Creed**

[Communion Slide] Jesus creates this space for us to receive grace and be made new.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Assignment/Blessing**

Hold Space + Lectio on Romans 8:9-16