

## YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER TWO

**“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”**

I want to take us back to 1955.

Interestingly, a new vaccine was being trialed that year - a vaccine for polio.

It was a year that saw the resignation of Churchill, the death of Einstein, the execution of Ruth Ellis, and the brave resistance of Rosa Parks, declining to give up her seat on the bus.

As you can imagine, as someone of advanced years, whose three score years and ten are nearly expired, I am able to recall all of these events extremely vividly.

And so I can clearly remember that it was also the year that the song “Love and Marriage” first saw the light of day on American TV, sung by Frank Sinatra no less. I am sure some of you at least are familiar with the words of the song, if not with the actual broadcast. Please feel free to join in:

*Love and marriage, love and marriage,  
Go together like a horse and carriage.  
This I tell ya, brother, you can't have one without the other.*

*Love and marriage, love and marriage,  
Go together like a horse and carriage.  
Dad was told by mother you can't have one  
You can't have none.  
You can't have one without the other.*

You may be more than a little surprised to learn that it's the last line of this song that provides us with our initial theme for today's reflection. But with a twist.

For as we continue in our series of studies on the work of the Holy Spirit we are thinking today about where the Spirit stands in relation to the Father and the Son. How are we to understand the relationship of the Spirit to the Son and the Father?

How are we to understand the set of relationships that exist between the Holy Spirit, and God the Father and God the Son.

And it's in this context that I want to encourage you to conclude with me, hopefully without being too disrespectful, that "you can't have one ,,,,,,,,,,,,,,without the other two". That whenever the Holy Spirit is present so too are God the Father and His Son Jesus. That, similarly, whenever God the Father is involved, so too are the Son and the Spirit. And that therefore nothing Jesus Christ has done or is doing now is without the active participation of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

But, having started with the conclusion, let's rewind to the beginning,,,,,,,,,,,,,

"In the beginning (John's gospel announces) was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."

In the beginning - the Word, the Logos, the Word that would become a man; the Word was not just with God, he WAS God; the Word that took on flesh was, and is, the very God through whom everything was made; all life and light was and is to be found in him.

So in the beginning we have God and we have the Word of God. Together. With each other. Sharing the same being of being God. And we might be forgiven for thinking that it is this duality, the Father and the Son, that make up the entirety of the Godhead. But the reality is more complex. There is a third partner in the being of God, as is about to be made clear at the beginning of the Son's earthly ministry, when, as we read in Matthew's gospel, John the Baptist reluctantly agrees to Jesus's request to be baptised:

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Here we see Heaven open. We see the curtain between the Creator and his creatures drawn back. And here we see Jesus, the Word of God now made flesh, in the company not just of God the Father who pronounces his love and approval, but also in the company of the Spirit of God, settling on his body in the way that a dove might descend and land, very gently. And so together, in the one place, at the same time we find God the Son, Jesus, the Word of God, fully God and fully human; in the company of God the eternal Father; and God the eternal Spirit.

Here we have God revealing himself to us as the one God in these three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

You can't have one without the other two. You don't get one without the other two. It's a principle that applies throughout the Gospel.

It's a principle that even applies at our own baptism. For in Matthew 28 it is into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - the three persons of the one true and eternal God - that Jesus commands us to be baptized together with all those who would be his disciples.

It is from passages like this, and from their own experience of what it meant to live as Christians in a gathered community, that the early church therefore began to develop the doctrine of the Trinity.

That, yes, there is only one God.

But that that same God lives in an inseparable spiritual community of three distinct persons who share the same divine being to such extent that:

- wherever we talk of God we talk of these three persons;
- and wherever one of these persons is active, the other two members of the Godhead are present and participating.

You can't have one without the other two.

That certainly seems to be the message of scripture.

We see it reflected in the famous Grace at the end of 2 Corinthians:

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

And we find it emphasised in the wonderful words found in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul speaks of the diversity yet fundamental unity of the body of Christ in terms of its reliance on and commitment to the Trinity:

“There are different kinds of gifts, (he writes) but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord [we are serving]. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.”

You don't get one, you can't have one, you wouldn't want one without the other two.

And as with Paul, so with Peter, who begins his first letter in this way

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

That abundance Peter craves for these scattered exiles seeming here to be almost guaranteed by the abundance he describes as existing in God himself.

The Christian understanding of God that emerges from the biblical record therefore is one where Christ the Son, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit belong together and co-exist with one another in divine harmony and eternal love. The Spirit is not the Father and the Father is not the Son. Neither is the Son the Spirit. Each is a divine person in his own right with a specific role to play.

But each of them is fully God. And each is inseparably bound to the other. In the words of Sinatra's song from '55, if you'll forgive me for returning there and paraphrasing from it one final time:

*Try, try, try to separate them, it's an illusion.*

*Try, try, try and you only come to this conclusion:*

*You can't have one..... without the other two*

Our very idea of God collapses when we try to separate the members of the Trinity or to imagine any one of them in isolation.

And remember, the doctrine of the Trinity is more than a statement that they all belong together. It is an understanding that each member of the Trinity is, in himself, fully God. Just as “the Word was with God and the Word was God”, and just as we also read in Colossians 2:19 that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form”; so too this same principle applies not just to God the Father also, but equally to God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is with God. The Holy Spirit is God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is fully pronounced for the first time when the early church came together in the first Council of Constantinople in the year 381 and is confident in declaring its belief not only in:

- “one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible”
- and in “one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father”
- it also declares its faith in “the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets”.

The Holy Spirit is the Lord, the Giver of life, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified. Who was with the Father and the Son in the beginning and has been active throughout the life of the people of Israel, as recorded in the old testament and through the prophets.

This Holy Spirit then has full status as an equal member of the Trinity. It's not that there is some kind of hierarchy here with God the Father in overall charge, God the Son as his deputy and the Holy Spirit as their junior associate.

The Holy Spirit is fully God and all the fullness of God is to be found in him. The Spirit is never present without the Father and the Son.

This equality of status is underscored by the varying order in which the three persons of the Trinity are spoken of:

- in Matthew 28 it is the Father first, the Son second, and third the Holy Spirit - the sequence we are all most familiar with, but
- in the grace of 2 Corinthians the Son is first, the Father second, the Spirit third
- in the passage from 1 Corinthians Paul speaks first of the Spirit, then of the Lord Jesus, and thirdly of God the Father
- and in the passage from Peter we have the Father listed first, then the Spirit and thirdly the Son

and this pattern of variation is confirmed in other passages such as Ephesians 4:4-6, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and Acts 2:33.

It's not that they are interchangeable, one for another, for they remain three distinct persons with distinct roles to play. It's more that they exist in an interplay and in bonds of unity that know nothing of a chain of command, or of superiors and subordinates. And in the context of what we are studying today - the Holy Spirit and his relationships with the Father and the Son - this then is of the most profound significance.

For if we believe in Jesus and all that he has accomplished for us then the gift we are given on this side of Heaven is the presence of the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the advocate. We read of this in John chapter 14 where Jesus says:

“If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 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.”

Who is it then that is living with us and living in us? The Holy Spirit, obviously, you might say. But it is obviously not the narrow, somewhat hackneyed sense of the Holy Spirit as a make-do-junior-substitute-until-the-Lord-returns-Holy-Spirit that we may have allowed ourselves to settle for.

For the Holy Spirit living with us and living in us is nothing less than the presence to us of the full reality of God in his divine life and being.

As one theologian puts it, the Holy Spirit is “the immediate presence to us of God almighty and all holy in his ultimate majesty, glory and power, in his sheer deity, in his utter Godness and holiness”.

God the unapproachable

God who is too great to be expressed or described adequately in words

God who transcends all our ability to know him or to speak about him

That God

That God has given us his very being to be present with us in the Holy Spirit. Think about that: given us his very being to be present with us.

He has done this

- so that we might approach him - or perhaps more accurately so that he might approach us
- so that we might understand and be able to express something of who God is to the extent that Holy Spirit interprets to us the life of the incarnate Son and his atoning sacrifice

And in the light of that fact there are only two things we can do:

1. the first thing we can do is to fall down in awe and wonder and worship that this supernatural and astonishing thing should be the case;

if nothing else should draw us to prayer it is this unspeakable fact, and if nothing else should teach us how to pray and what to pray for it is the knowledge that God is with us, that God is in us through the Holy Spirit prompting us, revealing Himself to us

2. and the second thing we can do is to allow the Holy Spirit to act upon us, individually and collectively, to let him waw his way among us

The Holy Spirit does not come to us with any fresh information about God. What we know about God we have had revealed to us by God in the life and atoning work of Jesus. But the Holy Spirit wants to draw our attention to the works of Jesus. He wants to explain them to us more perfectly and to deepen our understanding. He also wants to deepen our love of God on the basis of what he has shown himself to be like in Jesus.

And on the basis of that deepening understanding of and love for God he wants to share the gifts of the Spirit, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, so that our lives might increasingly be conformed to the nature of God. So that, like Him, we might (as we read in Galatians 5) be loving, joyful, peaceful, forbearing, kind, good, faithful, 23 self-controlled and gentle.

The Holy Spirit therefore does not overwhelm us. He does not replace our personalities with his own. Instead he wants us to allow Him to develop our personalities to the full so that we might be more fully human as God intended, not less.

Shaped and molded by Him to be more like Jesus, the most fully human person who has ever lived, and who continues to live (as that man, as that person) at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

And of course the Holy Spirit wants to help us to share with others who God is and what God is like and what God has accomplished for us. He wants to make us effective messengers of this Good News individually as his disciples and collectively as his church, he wants to help us make disciples and to baptize them into that full name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that reflects the true glory of his divine nature.

In closing, however, it is important for us to recognize that although he is already present with us and within us it is still necessary for us to allow the Spirit of God to act upon us. It is possible for us to thwart the Spirit and to deny him full access to our hearts and minds and souls. Although He is almighty God he chooses to demonstrate his unlimited power in ways quite unfamiliar to us. The Spirit doesn't just come to us and act upon us despite ourselves. He doesn't impose his gracious improvements upon us, even though they would undoubtedly be for our betterment. Instead he invites our active cooperation. He requires us to stir ourselves from our passive lethargy or from our active resistance and to work with him.

There are all sorts of reasons why this is the case, including God's respect for our own freewill, but one of those reasons is to do with an aspect character of God's character that we noted a few moments ago: his gentleness.

Think about the scene we read about earlier where after Jesus has been baptized the Spirit of God descends, not dramatically in a flash of lightning, but gently, and quietly, like a dove.



Or think of the way in which Jesus in Matthew 11 Jesus couches his invitation to follow Him:

‘Come to me, (he says) all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

Or most dramatically of all perhaps, think of the way the almighty, all-powerful God, the Creator of all things, chose to enter the world.

As a vulnerable and helpless human baby entrusted to the care and nurture of Mary and Joseph. That God should use his absolute power to demonstrate such absolute submissive gentleness tells us something utterly profound about his love for us and about his essential nature and character.

And it also tells us something about the characteristics his Holy Spirit yearns to cultivate in us. So, let’s close by reflecting on that gentle Jesus, on that gentle Holy Spirit of God, and on the gentleness God desires to see in us. Isaiah 11:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—

<sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling<sup>[a]</sup> together;  
and a little child will lead them.

<sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the cobra's den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

<sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.