

## I Believe in the Holy Ghost

[John 16:7-15](#)

The Apostles' Creed  
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Sunday, May 11, 2003

All genuinely Christian churches believe in the Trinity, in one God existing eternally and co-equally as three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But not all churches give equal time to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Mainline churches talk mainly about God the Father. Evangelical churches talk mainly about God the Son. Pentecostal churches talk mainly about God the Holy Spirit. Whatever label you put on National Presbyterian, we do focus mainly on God the Son, Jesus Christ. According to our vision statement, printed every week on the cover of our worship bulletin, we are "a ministry of grace, passionate about Christ's mission in the world." All the more urgent then, that we explore both seriously and sincerely the opening statement in the third article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost (or as we say today, the Holy Spirit)."

Here is a Reader's Digest condensed definition of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is God at work in the world. At work, first and foremost, TO POINT US TO JESUS. "He will glorify me," Jesus said in John 16:14, "because he will take what is mine and declare it to you." And Paul later added, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) So the principal task of the Holy Spirit is to bring us right back to our vision statement, that is, to Jesus Christ and to Christ's mission in the world.

New Testament scholar Dale Bruner came to Valley Presbyterian to lecture one fall. During the Q&A time one evening, someone asked, "What does the Holy Spirit do?" Bruner immediately drew a stick figure on the chart board and labeled it "Jesus." Then he ducked behind the chart board where no one could see him, reached one arm around it, and pointed to Jesus. "That's what the Holy Spirit does," he said. "The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus."

If the Holy Spirit is still something of a mystery to you, that's okay. The Holy Spirit is quite content to remain hidden behind the chart board so long as we believe in Jesus, so long as we are following Jesus, so long as we are serving Jesus, for the major work of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus come alive for us, and to make us come alive through faith in Jesus.

SECONDLY, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD AT WORK TO MAKE US LIKE JESUS. "All of us, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror," Paul writes, "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18) Early in his life Ben Franklin made it his goal to become like Jesus and Socrates. I don't know about Socrates, but I cannot imagine a loftier goal than to aim at the likeness of Jesus. Ben went at it by concentrating for a week at a time on each of thirteen different virtues. Every day he logged the number of times he was insincere, lazy, or intemperate, hoping over time to reduce his vices and to increase his virtues. But here's what he wrote fifty years later about his struggle with pride: "In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive and will every now and then creep out and show itself. You will see it, perhaps, often in my story for even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."

The Apostle recommends a different approach entirely. For Paul, personal transformation is not so much the result of rigorous moral discipline as it is of steady, singular concentration on Jesus our Lord. "Seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror," he writes, "we are being transformed..." The more we see of Jesus, the more we concentrate on Jesus, the more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will become like Jesus. There is nothing mysterious about this. Young people especially tend to metamorphose into the likeness of their favorite teachers and mentors. Shortly before moving to DC last year, I attended a college choir concert led by my friend, Derric Johnson. Derric is one of the most winsome Christians I know. He is an outstanding composer and arranger, and he has an infectious faith. He loves the Lord, he loves music, he loves young people, and he especially loves bringing all three together. In the middle of the concert, Derric interviewed several of the singers who were about to graduate. He asked about their relationship with Christ, and they responded with clear professions of faith. Then he asked about their future plans, and every one of them indicated they intended to go into some kind of music ministry. Why was I not surprised? Those students may have come to college intending to major in education or philosophy or biology, but then they spent four years under the wing of Derric Johnson, and they had been metamorphosed, transformed into his image.

The Holy Spirit, remember, points us to Jesus, and the more we reflect on our Lord's love for us who are so often so unlovely, the more loving the Spirit will make us toward folks who make life difficult for us. The more amazed we are that he would forgive us after repeating the same sins year after year, the more forgiving the Spirit will make us to people who hurt us time after time. The longer we marvel at our Lord's patience with us, the more patient the Spirit will make us toward people who rub us the wrong way. The more we concentrate on Jesus, the more the Spirit will grow within us what Paul in Galatians 5 calls the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As you spend time under the wing of Jesus your Lord, you will be transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

THIRDLY, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD AT WORK EQUIPPING US TO SERVE LIKE JESUS. Jesus' ministry didn't end when he ascended to the right hand of God the Father Almighty. His ministry was just beginning, and today, on May 11, 2003, the Holy Spirit is still equipping you and me to carry on Christ's life-changing work. There are several gift catalogs in the New Testament, and those catalogs contain examples of the kind of skills we need to do the work of Jesus Christ. What do you have a flair for? What do you enjoy doing? Can you organize things? We can use your managerial skills right here at National. Are you adept at listening? You can join one of our care teams or become a Stephen Minister. Can you saw a straight line? You can help build a home for Habitat for Humanity. What you do and do well is what the Holy Spirit will use to extend and expand Christ's ministry in the world.

Oh, I know what some of you are thinking. "However powerful the Holy Spirit may be, I'm only one person with trivial talents and an imperfect faith." We all feel that way at times, faced as we are by so many problems, seemingly insurmountable problems. I serve on the fund raising board of Presbyterian Border Ministry. PBM is a joint ministry of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico and the Presbyterian Church (USA). We do ministry all along the border from Reynosa to Tijuana where sleepy border towns have erupted into sprawling cities. And with that rapid population increase have come slums and unemployment and disease and malnutrition and death. During one of our early meetings we fell to questioning whether a handful of Presbyterians could make even a minor dent in that mountain of human need. After a few minutes of gloomy conversation, Jerry Stacy, the US director of Border Ministry, told the story of a father and his son walking along the beach one evening. Starfish were everywhere, stranded by the receding tide. The boy started picking them up one by one and tossing them back into the life-giving water. The father chuckled to himself and told his son to look up the beach. There were hundreds of starfish; they were everywhere. And the father said, "Son, throwing that one starfish back into the ocean won't make any difference to all those other starfish." "No, Dad," his son replied, "but it will sure make a difference to this starfish."

You can make a difference, if not to every needy person on five continents, then to the person next door, on the other side of the cubicle, over on the next block. Today, tomorrow, and every day, ask the Holy Spirit to help you rescue stranded starfish!