

**Date:** 28th February 2019  
**Talk:** WOW – The Holy Spirit in Action  
**Passage:** John 14:15-27

Indulge me!

I'm going to give you three fairly short but true anecdotes

So here we go

Anecdote number 1

Quite a few years ago Phil and I had a blazing row

I can't even remember what about

Something pretty trivial I'm sure

But I remember exactly where and when it happened

In the kitchen just before our evening meal

It was such a shouting match

that in mid argument I stomped out and went and sat down outside in the dark

And then my sinful nature really took over

I sat there thinking up all the stinging, hurtful, nasty things I could say in retaliation

Oh I had them lined up alright

And I was just about to go back in, when.....

..... our cat jumped up on my lap.

Now lovely as she was – she had never really been a lap cat

And usually at this time in the evening she was long gone, prowling the neighbourhood

But not this evening – there she was on my lap.

Very unusual behaviour for her.

And as I stroked her I calmed right down

And I let go of all the nastiness that had been building up inside me

I went in, found Phil and made peace.

Anecdote number 2

Quite a few years ago I received an unexpected sum of money – several thousand \$

I didn't feel we needed it and my church at that time did

But Phil had little connection with church

And he didn't think we should just give it away.

I stressed about this for weeks

I prayed about it, asking for God to guide me

but still I couldn't seem to work out the right thing to do.

Then one Sunday, kneeling at the altar, waiting for communion

Not even thinking about the problem and suddenly a solution came to me

After church I shared it with Phil and he was quite happy to go along with it

And I found complete peace in the decision we made together

Anecdote number 3

About 8 years ago my work suddenly came to an end

And Phil and I made several enormous decisions

Such as me retiring much earlier than we'd ever planned

Moving up to the Sunshine Coast

Building a house

I'm ashamed to say that I didn't really consult God much in any of this

No deep prayer about what we should do

No listening for God to speak to us

Yet another example of Ruth Craven ruling her own life and sidelining God

But here we are

And of all the joys of living up here

Two stand out head and shoulders above everything else

My faith has been transformed since we've been here

And Phil became a Christian 3 years after we moved here

So, there you are

3 random personal anecdotes

And why do I tell them

Well today we're considering the Holy Spirit in action

And I've often thought about whether, in each of these situations

it was the Holy Spirit in action in my life

On the one about the money

yes, I'm pretty sure it was the Holy Spirit that brought me to the solution –

not because I was on my knees at the altar rail at the time

But because of the tremendous sense of peace and rightness

as soon as the solution came into my mind

But this leaves a question .....

It felt right

my conscience was clear as a result of the decision

So are my conscience and the Holy Spirit the same thing?

.....

What about coming to the Sunshine Coast?

was it his leading that brought about the end of my work life?

Was it the Holy Spirit that led us to the Sunshine Coast ?

Does he intervene to change our paths so very definitely?

Well I don't know is the honest answer

But I do know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him

So, it may well have been Phil & Ruth Craven's leading that brought us up here

but it was no-one other than the Holy Spirit who could transform our faith so dramatically

Yes, I'm convinced that the Holy Spirit was in action here

and the other anecdote – the row with Phil

Again I don't know

Certainly the sudden and radical change in my temperament and my thoughts suggests that something interceded.

But ..... I mean .....the Holy Spirit using a cat???

I'm sure you also have similar anecdotes

Situations where you're not sure whether it was the Holy Spirit at work

So this is a big question isn't it

How do we know if it's the Holy Spirit in Action?

Well the place to go to answer this is of course the bible

So that we understand who the Holy Spirit is, what he does and how he works in us.

When we understand this

then we have a context for understanding how the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives

And so any actions that we attribute to him must be consistent with this understanding.

And, I really hope that, as a result of this WOW series, you understand all this much better now.

But, as I've read and thought about the biblical accounts of the Holy Spirit in action

both in the Old & New Testaments

one of the things I've been questioning over the last few weeks

Is whether the Holy Spirit is in action today in the same way as we see him in action in scripture

For example throughout the Old Testament we read of things that to us seem really supernatural

The Spirit came upon certain judges, warriors, and prophets in a way that gave them extraordinary power

And the Spirit enabled the prophets to hear directly from God and to speak from God

Jesus himself was, of course, filled with the Holy Spirit

and it was only through the power of the Holy Spirit that he could do what he came to do

heal the sick, cast out demons, raise people from the dead

And of course after Pentecost

After the apostles receive the Holy Spirit

Look at all the miraculous things reported in Acts

So we could be forgiven for thinking that the Holy Spirit isn't much in action in our world today

Because we don't seem to hear about similar jaw-dropping miracles, do we?

Why do you think that is?

And don't look to me for an answer because I don't really have one

Except to say that, thanks to a conversation with Ray Albrecht, Di's husband

I've been thinking about whether this is because we,

in our nice comfortable western Christian world

Don't really expect great things of the Holy Spirit

Or maybe we just don't attribute them to the Holy Spirit

Because we put them down to the wonders of science or technology or medical developments

But in fact there are probably more miracles happening today than we realise.

If we could collect all the authentic stories from all the missionaries and all the believers throughout the world,

if we could collect all the millions of encounters between Christians and sickness or Christians and demons

and all the so-called coincidences of the world,

we would be stunned.

And we would know that we are truly living in a world of jaw-dropping miracles

That the power of the Holy Spirit is as strong as ever.

And when I look back on my life

I can see that there have been miracles

It certainly feels miraculous that Phil became a Christian when he did

It certainly felt miraculous to know the complete peace of God whilst having a heart attack on a 13 hour flight

And it definitely feels miraculous when I look at how different I am now

compared to what I was like when God was just for Sundays.

These aren't the headline, flashing lights type of miracles I talked about earlier

This is the quiet work of the Holy Spirit

The evidence that he is in action even when we don't realise it.

In fact, The Holy Spirit is in action every minute of every day of our lives

Right from the moment that we accept Jesus as our saviour.

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to this point

It's the power of the Holy Spirit who brings us to new life

It's the Holy Spirit who binds us into the family of God

*For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body*

And then, once we are saved and belong to God, the Spirit takes up residence inside us

And he is immediately in action, beginning his work in us and on us

So what does this look like in our everyday lives

This is where I finally turn to the passage we read earlier

And I'm not going to go through it in detail

But I'm going to use it as a springboard for various thoughts about the Holy Spirit in Action

In verse 15 Jesus says "if you love me, keep my commands"

If you love me?

This is Jesus speaking

Jesus, the one who loves us so much that he died for us

Of course we love Jesus

and we want to keep his commands

we want to do this because we love him

But it's hard

In fact it's impossible for us to keep them perfectly

only Jesus could do that

But it's hard even trying to keep them isn't it

Jesus knew we needed help – that's why he sent the Holy Spirit

*Vs 16 "I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever"*

Someone to help us keep these commands

And not someone who comes and goes

But to live with us and be in us as it says in vs 17

We have the Holy Spirit available to help us every minute of every day

And we need him if we have any hope of keeping Jesus commands

And those commands

Well we studied this at WOW in May last year when we asked two questions:

What does it look like to Love God with all your heart and soul and mind

And what does it look like to love our Neighbour as we love ourselves

I remember being quite challenged by the magnitude of what this actually looks like

And it's why I'm so thankful that Jesus did send the Holy Spirit to us

Because he's here to help us with this.

So how does the Holy Spirit help us keep these commands?

Well the starting point is that he helps us know God.

As I spoke about a couple of weeks ago,

Jesus consistently refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth

And it is only through the Holy Spirit that we can know the truth

The truth about God and about Jesus and about the Holy Spirit himself

How?

Well he knows God so intimately

In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 Paul writes

*“The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”*

And so, since we have been given the amazing gift of God’s Spirit inside us

we too can comprehend the thoughts of God

Or at least the thoughts that he chooses to reveal to us by his Holy Spirit.

He does this of course through the Bible, God’s word to us.

And not only was the Bible written by the power of the Holy Spirit

But this same Spirit enables us to understand the Bible

By teaching us and by giving us wisdom

Wisdom to be discerning

The Holy Spirit helps us see the truth from folly

Whether that’s in our understanding of the bible or in other related things we may read or hear.

Have you ever had that nagging feeling when you maybe hear a sermon or read something

and you think ...hmmmm I’m just not sure about that

Is that really what that bible passage means

or

is that idea supported by scripture

I have ..... often

mainly when I’m reading commentaries or listening to sermons online

But how do I know to question what I'm reading or hearing?

Where does that inner voice come from that prompts me to seek other views

It's the Holy Spirit

Isn't it wonderful to know that he is there to guide us in this way

we just need to listen out for his voice

And when we seek the Holy Spirit to guide us to know God better,

to know his truth

to know what he is saying to us through his word

to know what he wants of us

Then we can be sure that our inner voice is leading us along good paths.

Now one of the questions that came to mind as I was writing this

And it's a question I've often heard asked.

Is the Holy Spirit the same as my conscience?

Well, I think the answer to this is "yes and no"

Our consciences are fluid things

The conscience I have now is not the same as my conscience when I was a kid

And my conscience can, if I let it, be shaped or in fact eroded by society's expectations

Or by my own sinful determination

You know the more often you do the wrong thing

The quieter your conscience can get.

But if we open ourselves up to the power of the Holy Spirit

If we turn to him and through him seek to know God's will

If we allow the Spirit of Truth to guide us in all things

If we allow our conscience to be shaped by the Holy Spirit

Then in effect they become the same thing

The voice of our conscience is the voice of the Holy Spirit

And then we can rely on our conscience or our good judgement or our instinct

Because it's all shaped by the Holy Spirit.

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So where else in our lives is the Holy Spirit in action

Helping us keep these two great commandments?

Well, in our conversations with God,

Conversation with God is essential

so that, in obedient love for him, we can discern his will for our lives

And so that we can, in prayer, bring to him all our cares and concerns,

not just for ourselves but for our neighbours as well.

But it's only through the Holy Spirit that we can hear God speak

And it is only through the Holy Spirit that God hears our prayers

Hearing the voice of God is actually hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Without his active participation in our lives the heavens would be silent,

It's by the Holy Spirit that God speaks to us through his word

It's the Holy Spirit who sharpens our spiritual sensitivity

and makes our hearts better able to hear the voice of God when he speaks to us.

And it's the Holy Spirit who prompts us to pray,

who shows us what to pray for

who carries our prayers to God

And when we don't even know how to pray

Romans chapter 8

*.... the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans..... the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

It's an incredible comfort isn't it

to know that even when you don't know how to pray or what to pray for,

the Spirit intercedes and interprets our prayers.

But what about those times when we're struggling

Struggling with our focus on loving God and trusting in him

Struggling with all the problems we or our families or friends are dealing with

Struggling with temptation.

No matter what we face the Holy Spirit is there to help us

His role is all encompassing.

He is our Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor  
,Strengthener.

And so, no matter what the situation, we can call on the power of the Holy Spirit

to help us in whatever we face.

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So when we trust the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to us

To help us understand God's word

To help us speak to God

And to be that inner voice that helps us hear God

Then yes, here is the Holy Spirit,

In action, shaping every aspect of who we are and how we live

Leading us, counselling us, guiding us

This is what it means to walk by the Spirit

Ultimately, all the good inclinations or preferences or desires that we have  
are given by the Holy Spirit.

This is the Holy Spirit in action.

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Now you may be wondering why I haven't talked about those well-known  
verses from Galatians

You know the verses about love, joy peace, patience ....

Come on you can recite them with me

Kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

Well that's because these aren't works of the Spirit, they are fruits of the  
spirit

It is the Holy Spirit that produces these fruits in our lives

These are both the results and the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in  
us

And this ties back to something I talked about a couple of weeks ago

When I said that the job of the Holy Spirit is to reveal and glorify Christ

Because when the Spirit produces this sort of fruit in our lives

He is giving to our neighbours, to the world around us

A glimpse of who Jesus is.

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So as I look back over the last four weeks,

I'm so thankful that we are focusing on the Holy Spirit this year

Thanks to all these talks I feel as if I can explain ....

And yet accept that I cannot fully explain the Holy Trinity

I now have a definite understanding of who the Holy Spirit is as a distinct part of the Trinity

I know that he has a clear job to do – to point to Jesus

I understand better his power at work in the body of Christ,

The provider of spiritual gifts that enable the church on earth to grow

And to work together for the common good

I can now see that it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit

that we understand the depth of our sin and our great need for our saviour

And that it's the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith in Jesus

It's through the Holy Spirit in action in our lives

that we grow as Christians in our love for God and our desire to do his will

And it is the Holy Spirit who shapes us to be more like Jesus.

Do you see how much we need the Holy Spirit?

If he weren't here with us, God would be distant,

we would have no assurance of our salvation or security.

We would never see anyone come to Christ.

We wouldn't understand God's word.

We would not be aware of God's presence, nor be assured of his love.

We couldn't be sure that we really belonged to Him.

We would not become more sensitive to sin.

We would not be growing in Christian character.

But thankfully we do have him,

and because of him we can have the most joyful and fruitful life,

if we put ourselves into his hands and yield our will to his control.

But, as an evangelist called RA Torrey said

*The Holy Spirit eagerly desires to do His whole work for each of us. He will do for us everything we will let Him do.*

How much are you willing to let him do in **your** life?

Amen