

The Trinity were planning a holiday. The Spirit, manifesting the creative part of the divine nature, was coming up with the ideas. "Let's go to New York," he suggested. "No, no, no," said the Father, "They're all so liberated, they'll spend the whole time calling me 'Mother' and it will just do my head in." So the Spirit sat back and thought. "I know, what about Jerusalem?" he said. "It's beautiful and then there's the history and everything." "No way!" the Son declared. "After what happened the last time, I'm never going there again!" At this point, the Spirit got annoyed and went off in a huff. Sometime later he returned and found that the Father and Son had had an idea they both thought was excellent:

"Why don't we go to Canterbury?" said the Son.

"Perfect!" cried the Holy Spirit. "I've never been there before!"

All joking aside, today we come to the conclusion of our series exploring the Creeds, and to the third and final person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. I think for many of us, and for many Anglicans, the Holy Spirit is probably the most difficult 'person' of the Trinity for us to engage with or to think about. Other traditions like Pentecostals and other charismatics don't necessarily have this problem, but for us it can be difficult understand the Holy Spirit, let alone experience the Holy Spirit. God the Father we understand because we can wrap our heads around him as Creator and Sustainer of all things – even if he seems distant to us at times; Jesus, God the Son we often have the easiest time engaging with because of his Incarnation – even if we don't always understand what he said or did; but the Holy Spirit is hard to peg down – the imagery and metaphors to describe the Holy Spirit is often ethereal, vague. The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity least described in our Scriptures: throughout the Old and New Testaments we get to know a lot about who God the Father is, and who God the Son is, but although the Holy Spirit – or the Spirit of God – is present within both the Old and New Testaments, references to the Holy Spirit pale in comparison to those referring to the Father or the Son. And yet despite this relative dearth of reference in the scriptural witness affirming the Holy Spirit remains part of the Creeds we recite week in and week out, affirming the Holy Spirit remains an integral part of the baptismal covenant and the promises that the parents and godparents of Aiyana Sandy will be making on her behalf later today in our liturgy of baptism. And so today we'll dive into what we affirm about the Holy Spirit in our Creeds and how that plays out in our lives of faith.

To begin with what is it that we affirm about the Holy Spirit in the Creeds? One of the most helpful pieces of advice I received in seminary for better understanding the Creeds was to think of each of the three distinct sections as dedicated to the one person of the Trinity. The first section is dedicated to the Father, the second to the Son and the final section to the Holy Spirit – this is perhaps a little too simplistic but it helps to map the Creeds in our heads. At first glance the final section of the Creed doesn't seem to apply entirely to the Holy Spirit, since after all we affirm our belief in the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church, we affirm our belief in one baptism, in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. In some ways this might seem like a laundry list of vital but unconnected Christian beliefs, but I think that ultimately all of these beliefs fall under the purview of the Holy Spirit, and I want to explore each of these areas this morning. And so in the Creeds we learn that the Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son and who with the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified; we learn that Holy Spirit forms and guides the church; we hear that the Holy Spirit is active in baptism and the forgiveness of sins; we hear that the Holy Spirit is active in the renewal of ourselves and all creation in the world to come.

*The Holy Spirit is God, the Lord the giver of Life:* While the Holy Spirit can seem like a mystery at the best of times, our Scripture reading today reveals who the Holy Spirit is. In our passage from John, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the Advocate, who will remain with the disciples forever after Jesus ascends into heaven. Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them orphaned, that he would not leave them without his presence to guide and direct them, and the Holy Spirit fulfills this promise. Jesus told his disciples that "because I live, you also will live." It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can experience the fullness of life in Christ, the fullness of the everlasting and eternal life of God accomplished for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach the disciples everything and remind them about all that Jesus had said to them. And finally Jesus suggested that the presence of the Holy Spirit would be peace for the disciples. The Holy Spirit is therefore the promise that the activity and presence of God would not be removed when Jesus ascended to the Father, it is God's promise to remain with us whenever we gather together in the name of Jesus to worship and honour the Father.

*The Holy Spirit gathers and directs the Church:* If the Holy Spirit is the enduring presence of God with his people, it is presence with purpose, and not just a static promise that God will be with us. God is after all a dynamic God, like Aslan in CS Lewis' Narnia series, God is on the move – God is actively involved in the world through the activity and power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the place where we experience the Holy Spirit most clearly is in the Church as we gather together with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to worship God, to hear God's word, to receive and extend reconciliation, to be fed with the heavenly things and finally to go out into the world in mission. The Church is after all a product of the Holy Spirit. We might be here to follow Jesus and to worship God the Father,

but we are gathered by the Holy Spirit. The story of Pentecost – with wind and fire, and the twelve disciples speaking in every language – is the birth of the Church, the feast of Pentecost that we celebrate every year is the Birthday party of the Church, and it is because of the activity of the Spirit that we can celebrate the fact we are all here today. When we say that we believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church: we are affirming the activity of the Holy Spirit which makes the Church One in baptism (more on that later!); we are affirming the activity of the Holy Spirit which makes the Church holy – set apart for God and for God’s missionary purposes; we are affirming the activity of the Holy Spirit that makes the Church catholic, universal – that the church is made up from every tribe and language and people and nation centred around the one gospel; and finally we are affirming the activity of the Holy Spirit that makes the Church apostolic – sent out into the world with a message to live and share.

*The Holy Spirit makes our participation in baptism and forgiveness of sins possible:* As I just mentioned the Holy Spirit makes the Church “One” in Baptism. Baptism is ultimately what creates and forms the Church, we are welcomed into the Body of Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism and it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can participate in the dying and rising to new life in Christ. Whether we are baptised as a child with parents and godparents making promises on our behalf, as Aiyana will be shortly, or as an adult making those promises for ourselves we can only do so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether we make the decision ourselves or whether it’s made for us on our behalf, it can only be made through by virtue of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the words and faith to respond to Christ. We cannot do this on our own, we cannot answer the three renunciations and three affirmations at baptism, we cannot commit to the baptismal covenant, without the Holy Spirit. Paul in his letter to the Romans writes that the “Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” Just as the Spirit intercedes for us in prayer, so too does the Spirit help us in our weakness in Baptism. It is by the power of the Spirit, through the death and resurrection of Christ that we can experience the divine life in relationship with the Father. As we come to the baptism of Aiyana in a few moments, the Holy Spirit is present here amongst us, the Spirit gives her parents, godparents and all of us the words and faith to welcome her into the Body of Christ, by the Holy Spirit we will later this morning welcome Aiyana into the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. This is how the Spirit makes our participation in baptism and the forgiveness of sins possible.

*The Holy Spirit is active in renewal of all Creation:* In the creation account of Genesis, depending on the translation, we read that in the beginning the Spirit or wind of God hovered over the deep. The Holy Spirit was active in creation, so it should be of no surprise that the Holy Spirit is active in the New Creation. Just as we who share in the death and resurrection of Jesus are made new by the power of the Holy Spirit, so too is all of Creation. It is sometimes difficult for us to see the renewal of the world around us amidst such death and destruction especially following the brutal attacks in Lebanon, Mali, Paris, Nigeria and Kenya this week. It can be difficult, but even in the darkest moments we can see Grace, even in the darkest moments we can experience a foretaste of the heavenly Kingdom. Famous television personality Mr. Rogers once said that his mother told him to look for the helpers during any disaster, because there are always helpers, it is in acts of love, care and tenderness – even in the midst of horrible atrocities – that we can catch glimpses of the renewed Creation. Believing and trusting in the Holy Spirit and his presence and activity in the world, ensures that we will not be consumed by fear and despair, that fear and despair will not lead us to hatred and oppression, but rather that we in our lives now might be outposts of that New Creation, that we might be outposts of love that welcome the stranger and refugee, that feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, love the unlovable. Even while we look forward the fulfillment of all things in Christ, we are called to live in the Spirit now, to enjoy the first fruits of renewal and new life, now.

The Holy Spirit is the Lord the giver of life, the Holy Spirit gathers and directs the Church, the Holy Spirit makes our participation in baptism and forgiveness of sins possible and finally the Holy Spirit is active in the renewal of all things – this is why we believe and affirm the Holy Spirit every week. While the Holy Spirit will likely always remain the least understood of the persons of the Trinity, I pray that you might embrace the power of the Holy Spirit in your life today and forevermore!

Amen.