

July 23rd, 2017: The Mighty Spirit's Power



When we think of superheroes, we often think of big, boisterous characters who use limitless strength to defeat evil, to save the innocent from injustice and restore peace. As we've been discovering over the past few weeks in worship, this is a great description of God's activity in our world, and even the work that we're called to do with God's help.

We began this sermon series three weeks ago talking about God, the Almighty Creator, Parent of all, as the Ultimate Superhero – our protector, guard, and guide, the one we cry out to when life gets hard. We explored some of the Old Testament language for God and found it surprisingly similar to that used in the superhero comic books and movies.

Last week, Pastor Christina shared how Jesus is her favorite superhero, the one who is always there for her in her time of need, the one who she looks to for hope and salvation. While Jesus might not fit the definition of a superhero, because after all, he is not fictional - through his life, death, and resurrection, he was and continues to fit the bill of superhero for many.

This week, we turn to the Holy Spirit, considering ways that the Spirit of God acts as a superhero in our lives and communities. The Spirit is often a harder topic of conversation than Creator and Christ – it's sometimes even called the shy member of the trinity because people don't know where or how to look for it. We see the Creator's fingerprint in each blade of grass and wonder at God's power at each new birth. We imagine Jesus sitting beside us as a friend would, listening to our struggles and missteps, forgiving us despite it all – for he knows how hard it is to walk in our shoes. But the Spirit... how do we relate to wind and flame, symbols traditionally used to illustrate the Spirit's presence. How do we know the actions of that which we cannot see or communicate with? The scripture we read from John's Gospel reminds us that the Spirit abides in us, that God never leaves us orphaned, because the Spirit is with us always. This inwardly working presence of God is different than the outwardly focused roles of Creator and Christ – both which primarily act on the world around us – the Spirit's action comes from within.

This sustaining Spirit of God is the Great Influencer... the motivator and nudge that works within each one of us daily – as individuals and corporately. While the Creator brings life and Christ brings redemption and salvation, the Spirit is the ever-present force of God moving within and throughout us each day. This kind of influencing power might seem like a weaker superpower, but I would not underestimate the greatness of the Spirit's power and strength.

The Biblical word used to refer to the POWER of the Holy Spirit is the Greek word dy-namis, from which we derive the English term dynamite—an explosive force. The Holy Spirit is not passive, but an active force, of explosive power to encourage, to empower. It is through this dynamis power that we are inspired, or "in-Spirited" – taking what is already inside us and magnifying it to have a greater impact on the world and the lives of those around us.

On an individual level of personal faith, the Holy Spirit is a conveyor of grace. The Spirit works to strengthen, inspire, motivate, comfort, bless, and bestow gifts upon individuals to build them up in faith. The Spirit helps us with our everyday faithful living, drawing out the best in us, almost like the little angel sitting on our shoulder, encouraging us to live into the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Spirit even helps us to pray when we don't have the words, when life is too full of heart

break and despair, the Spirit intercedes on our behalf with sighs and groans, wordless prayers lifted heavenward.

I don't know if you have ever noticed, but I am a deep sigher... I even had a confirmand from my previous church ask his mom if I had a breathing problem. ☺ When I sigh or breathe deeply, I am consciously, or sometimes without even realizing it, taking in the strength of the Spirit. Both the Old and New Testament names for the Holy Spirit – *Ruach* and *Neuma* – also mean wind or breath. It was the *Ruach*, the Breath of Life that God breathed into the lungs of humanity in the creation story – and I believe that every time we take a breath, that same Spirit continues to breathe life into us again and again. It is when we stop breathing in this Breath of Life that our bodies die. John Wesley preached that the Spirit is an active and re-active participant in our journey of faithful living; he said the believer undergoes “continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit: God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and re-action of the soul upon God.” When I am feeling anxious, nervous, overwhelmed – or just need to center my heart and mind on God’s presence within me, I take a nice deep breath – and with that breath, feel reconnected with God and ready to tackle whatever lies ahead.

It is the Holy Spirit that inspires me each week as I write sermon after sermon, and then on Sunday mornings as I deliver the message – a word of hope, inspiration, or sometimes a gentle nudging into action – a Word that hopefully connects you to God, or helps you to reflect on life and faith a little differently. This is no simple task, and it is not one I take lightly... I do some of my heaviest sighing during sermon prep and delivery! For me, the Spirit is without a doubt my superhero as I approach this and many other components of my job – I would not be able to do what I do without the Spirit’s guidance and inspiration. I breathe deeply of the Spirit before I enter into prayer, before I walk into a hospital room for a visit, before I sit down for a pastoral counseling session, before I preside over a wedding, or say the commendation during a funeral service. I rely heavily on the Holy Spirit on most everything I do – not just at work, but in my home life too.

I wonder what it is in your life that you most rely on the Spirit of God for? Is there something at your work or home that challenges you to your max, that finds you praying for strength and wisdom, help to accomplish a task in a meaningful and possibly even life-transforming way? Whether we believe it or not, God has created within us gifts and abilities to do great things... and sometimes we just need a little nudge or puff of inspiration to put it all into action. That is the continual and heroic action of the Spirit in our lives!

The Holy Spirit is in us and is waiting on us! It’s ready anytime of the day or night. It’s is saying, “I am here to help you, to strengthen you and to lead you. I want to comfort you today. You know that problem you’ve been having? I want to help you with that.” This dynamic, explosive super-POWER of the Holy Spirit is within each one of us, ready and willing to bring out God’s best from within. To power us into action, living out our faith in big and small ways. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are transformed into God’s Superheroes! Thanks be to God! Amen.