

Uncomfortable Faith: Uncomfortable Comforter
John 14:15-17
St. Mark's & St. James UCC ~ September 6, 2020
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Many years ago I was invited to a church service in Brookfield (west of Milwaukee) by a friend. I knew this was a Pentecostal church, but I didn't understand how different the style of worship would be, from that which I was used to.

It was a mid-week evening service that was filled with expressions of the Holy Spirit present, active and a significant part of the worship. This was expressed by individuals running up and down the aisles at times; or by laying prostrate or kneeling at a chair during prayer time. There were at times shouting ~ and other deep expressions of the Spirit in and of worship.

Having come from a Catholic background and with little experience of other forms of worship beyond that of stoicism, theological precision and exactitude, and a comfortable repetitiveness ~ this wild and unruly form of worship was beyond uncomfortable for me.

We do talk quite easily about God the Father or Creator and God the Son or Redeemer. We may have our questions; we may be finding our way in understanding what is being asked of us. But, we talk about the Creator & Redeemer, the Father & the Son every Sunday.

But, the supernatural activity of the Trinity's third person can be off putting and make us feel UNcomfortable. However, as we learn more about the work of the Comforter ~ the Holy Spirit ~ we learn that we don't need to be afraid and we don't need to avoid the Spirit. Quite the opposite actually.

Paul tells us of the Spirit as a person – a full member of the Trinity – who lives in the people of God and the church.

John writes in several chapters about the Spirit as our divine Comforter in Christ's absence. It was the Helper (Advocate/Counselor/Comforter) that Jesus sent to be with them (and us) forever.

The Spirit is seen in both our Old and New Testament. In the OT the Spirit empowered specific people at certain times for certain tasks such as King Saul as seen in 1 Samuel. In the NT, following Pentecost, the Spirit has a new role as a permanent, indwelling presence of every believer.

John and Peter tell us of the Spirit who guides us in truth.

Paul makes it clear that sanctification comes not from our own efforts and how good we can be, but from the Spirit of God within us.

Luke reminds us in the Book of Acts that the Spirit empowers mission and grows the church. Even as Jesus tells his followers: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

And the 1st letter to the Corinthians tells of the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit given to each believer and especially for those gathered in Christ's name "to build us up as we live out the life of the future in the present age."

All of this sounds wonderfully positive ~ this is a good thing, right? And yet, an emphasis on Holy Spirit in churches can be highly divisive.

Charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit (healing by touch, speaking in tongues, prophecy, hearing directly from God) 1 Corinthians 12 gives us a list of 9 gifts of the Spirit that are still available to the church today. Again ~ this sounds like a good thing, right?

On one side there are those who say these gifts were for the time period in which the church was first being formed. It no longer applies today.

And on the other are those who say these gifts are still part of the church today.

There is fear that these gifts might be abused for personal gain. Isn't "God speaking to you directly" a justification for almost anything?"

That fear compounds with the fear of emotionalism (we don't want to show too much emotion ~ that is a sign of weakness and causes embarrassment); the fear of fanaticism (others might think I'm crazy); the fear of the unfamiliar (I've never experienced this before and it makes me uncomfortable; I don't know what's next; what if I don't like it; I've always done it this way before).

And too, the fear of letting go of control... I don't know what will happen if I give up control of my life, my mind, my emotions to the Holy Spirit. I want to understand God without giving up those things I should be in control of.

So there is this tension ~ a balance with stress attached to it ~

of the known and the unknown;

the Logic of the Word and the wildness of the Spirit;

the head connection of doctrine and theology and

the heart connection of emotion and releasing of control to the Holy Spirit.

While that may make us feel uncomfortable, it is something we cannot be without.

The Spirit is the empowering presence for the church in

Worship

Witness

Unity

Mission

Spiritual growth

And every other function of the body.

I'd like you to do something at home right now. You're going to hit pause (not yet! 😊) and if you are with someone else to have a brief discussion; if you are by yourself to get a pen and paper.

Talk about what makes you feel uncomfortable when thinking about expressions of worship and the Holy Spirit or the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

1 Corinthians 12 helps us to understand the gifts or expressions given to us by the Holy Spirit. Take a moment and read that first.

- 1) What makes you feel uncomfortable about these Spiritual expressions?
- 2) Have you ever been in a church where this is part of the worship experience?
 - a. Speaking in tongues, healing by touch and prayer
- 3) How do you feel about prophecies or hearing God speak to a person?

Hit Pause and Have at It!

Welcome back! Feel free to forward me any revelations you might have found; epiphanies you might have had; or questions that might have come up. I'd love to hear from you.

I want to end today's message with this. We mention the Holy Spirit often throughout worship: When officiating a wedding, the couple will exchange rings and vows "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"

I baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I bless the elements of Communion in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Apostles' Creed we express our belief in the Holy Spirit and recognize that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Peter, John and Paul wrote about the Holy Spirit. Throw in Ringo and we've got the first iteration of the Beatles. 😊

The writer of Genesis finds such value in the Holy Spirit that the second verse of the Bible – Gen 1:1; Gen 1:2... reads:

"and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

The Spirit is present. And while it might be uncomfortable for many of us, we must intentionally and actively make the Spirit part of our worship – not a passive part, but an active part. The strength of the Body and the effectiveness of our mission and ministry depends on our welcoming of the Spirit's power. Together my friends, together we'll learn how to do this. Together.