

Sermon | 2 August 2026 | Jonathan Chaplin John 14: 15-24 + Ephesians 3: 14-21

- as Becky explains in the newsletter, in August we'll be focusing on the theme of prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel
- spoiler alert: the climax comes when we get to the remarkable chapter 17, where we get to listen in on Jesus himself praying an extended prayer for his disciples, knowing that before too long he will be taking leave of them – the 'farewell discourses'
- today's passage touch on all the central themes of John's Gospel, which as you know by now blend and interweave with each other making it hard to sort them out
- to get us going today, I want explore some thoughts from our passage about the relationship between **Prayer**, the **Holy Spirit** and **Love** – but not quite in that order

1. The Holy Spirit

- in our passage we don't get a prayer of Jesus but we do get a promise of a prayer - and not just any prayer, but a momentous one:
- a prayer that God will give Jesus' followers the Holy Spirit, and a guarantee that that prayer will be answered:
- 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate [the Holy Spirit] to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth' (v16)
- now it's not as if the Spirit hasn't already been working in them: in the next verse Jesus tells them that, unlike the world which doesn't know the Spirit, 'you already know the Spirit because he abides in you' (v17)
- but this is the first time that Jesus promises that the Spirit will be *given* to them by the Father, suggesting something significant is in view
- and this does indeed prove to be life-changing for them: Jesus is referring to the Day of Pentecost, when God came in what Acts 2 call a 'violent wind and fire' to equip the believers for the mission Jesus he had left them, to proclaim God's love to all nations
- on the day, Peter interprets this extraordinary event to the bewildered onlookers by quoting an OT prophecy, that one day God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh, so that men and women, young and old, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, would all prophecy of the love of God now extended to all
- so in John 14 this is what Jesus is telling his disciples that he will be praying for them: his physical presence will leave them, but he will not leave them orphaned, but will come to dwell with them in the presence of the Spirit
- he says this will happen 'in a little while' – perhaps weeks, even days - but when it happens, all the disciples' doubts and fears will be cast aside:
- 'On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you' (v20)
- here the Spirit is referred to as their Advocate, the Greek word means a helper in a law court:
- the metaphor suggests that the Spirit will testify to the Father that these people have indeed received the truth and have thrown in their lot with Christ – this is the truth about their situation – says the Spirit of truth

- Jesus is speaking here to his own disciples, but everything promised to them is also promised to us; the church today is the inheritor of that promise; we are the recipients of the same Holy Spirit; and we are summoned to the same mission
- Not that we never experience doubts or fears but that we are now indwelt by Christ himself through the Spirit

2. Love

- I've mentioned 'love' a few times, but there's more to say about how love fits into John's account of the Spirit
- love isn't incidental to the work of the Spirit: the passage opens with words about love: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (v15)
- why does Jesus start that way? It quickly becomes clear that love is at the very heart of the work of the Spirit, in two ways:
- **first**, *the Spirit invites us into the love that flows within God*: it's not just that Spirit teaches us that we are the beneficiaries of God's love, but that the Spirit draws us into the intimacy of the love that already exists between the Father and the Son
- elsewhere Jesus has said, I don't only call you servants, now I call you friends; here he's going further and saying, and you're members of the family
- and the Spirit is acting as our Advocate, our representative:
- it's as if the Spirit is reassuring the Father that the disciples, those who have been drawn by the love of Christ and believe his truth, are indeed entitled to admission into this intimate family setting – 'you see these people, they family now, and so we welcome them with joy' – and today, we are part of that family
- **second**, *the Spirit calls us to share that love outside God*: the Spirit commissions and empowers us to demonstrate the love of God to the world and invite others to it
- the Spirit calls us into 'the beloved community', where all are loved equally by God and by each other – a community that will then bear God's love to all beyond it
- so far so good - but what about that word 'commandments'?
- to our modern ears, that seems to clash with love: where's there's love, surely there can't be commandment? Hasn't love done away with commandment?
- not for Jesus: here as so often we need to recall that Jesus was Jewish: for Jews, God was present in Torah: 'law', or 'instruction' – which contained many commandments
- but while the purpose of these commandments had often get lost, they were always intended as laws of love, laws expressing love, laws giving practical form to love
- they fleshed out practically what love meant in ordinary life – for families, for the poor, for widows, orphans and aliens, for rulers and judges, for the land, even for animals
- the details are no longer binding, but love was always the real point of these commandments: so when Jesus talks about the two great commandments, to love God and to love our neighbour (Matt. 22), he wasn't inventing something new; he was actually quoting the Old Testament
- what he angrily opposed was commandments that thwarted love, that restricted love, or that laid crushing burdens on people that they couldn't bear

- but love remains the controlling purpose of Jesus' commandments
- which is why he can say that you show your love for me by keeping my commandments of love, because in doing so you show that I am doing my work of love in you, and you can't keep it to yourselves
- you show that you have indeed responded to the Spirit's invitation into the love of God, and that you already in the business of showing it to others
- so love, then is right at the heart of the work of the Holy Spirit
- which is why Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 says that love is the point of all the gifts of the Spirit: if you boast about having spectacular spiritual gifts but don't show love, you're faking it - here is what love is:
- 'Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (vv.4-7)
- these are the 'commandments' of Jesus

3. Prayer

- briefly, back to the theme of prayer
- so Jesus prays to the Father for us to be given the Holy Spirit
- and that prayer is ongoing: it's the ceaseless prayer of Jesus that we be continually lured into the love that is within God, and that we show that love to others by keeping Jesus's loving commandments, which means practical deeds of care, compassion and justice
- this is strikingly similar to Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus, in that stunning first reading: Paul asks for three things that the church today can also ask for:
- he asks that God will strengthen us in our inner being with power through the Spirit (v 16) – we know that the Spirit has already been given to us in answer to Jesus's prayer, so now we can pray with confidence that we may experience more and more of the Spirit's work
- he asks God to grant that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith as we are rooted and grounded in love – or, so *that* we are rooted and grounded in love – so that the love within God flows through us to others
- and he asks that the Spirit may allow us to grasp the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of Christ's love, that we may be filled with God's fullness – because being filled with that goodness just is grasping the love of Christ and showing it to others
- so as we start this series on prayer and the Holy Spirit, we're reminded that, whenever we pray, however we pray, whatever we pray for – and we'll be learning more about all that in the coming weeks - prayer is fundamentally allowing ourselves to be lured by the Spirit into the love that flows within God, and formed by the Spirit to bear witness to that love in a world that so often can't see God and yet is desperate for love.