**Stowe 29/01/23 – *The Work of the Holy Spirit* - John 16:5-16, Gal 5:22-25**

This passage is a small section of Jesus’ final teaching to the disciples in what is sometimes called the upper room discourse. In the previous chapter, Jesus presented his metaphor of the vine and the branches, reminding his followers to remain in touch with and dependent on him. The chapter continues by describing how the world will be opposed to Jesus’ followers and the church, before bringing them comfort with the promise of the Holy Spirit. In Chapter 16, Jesus gives his disciples useful and challenging teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit, the advocate or counsellor. It is striking, that although many Christians think of the Holy Spirit in terms of power or miracles, here he is an advocate, a counsellor, one who advises, has a quiet word, who comes alongside us.

We pick up the story in the first few verses of chapter 16, as Jesus tells the disciples that although they may be sad at his departure, it is essential that he leaves and sends the Holy Spirit to carry on his work.

*7But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

Why does Jesus tell his followers in v.7 that the advocate, the Holy Spirit, will not come unless he first departs? Some people talk about Jesus being one person in one time and one space, while the Holy Spirit is a more diffuse, unlimited presence. That’s not necessarily wrong. But if we look at where this passage is found in John, where Jesus has been giving strong and complicated teaching to his followers, which arguably becomes only more complex and demanding in chapter 17, it is clear that Jesus is laying out a manifesto for the inner circle who will become the Church, a description of how to live, in dependence on him and his Father.

The context is the coming of the kingdom of God after the resurrection and ascension, when Jesus is proven to be king, to all heaven and earth. There is lots about the kingdom of God in the Gospels, and its decisive inauguration comes when Jesus is raised from the dead and ascends to his Father’s right-hand. He returns to his Father, in glory and power, as king of the new Kingdom. In this whole chunk of John then, from chapter 14 to 17, Jesus is telling his disciples how to live and work for him in the kingdom. When Jesus is proclaimed king and ascends, the Spirit will continue that teaching work in the hearts and minds of those citizens of the new Kingdom. The upper room discourse and the ministry of the Spirit will clarify and expand on Jesus’ roles, first as teacher and example, next as sacrifice for sin, and finally as sovereign. The Spirit will carry on the teaching and transformative work of Christ and apply it to the hearts of the disciples.

*8When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:*

The Holy Spirit will prove the world to be in error about, sin, righteousness, and judgment. These verses are notoriously difficult to understand and explain. This is possibly the only part of the gospels where we read about the Spirit working in the people of the world rather than Christians. Let’s have a look.

*9about sin, because people do not believe in me;*

In v.9, the Spirit will show that the world is wrong about sin, because people do not believe in Christ. Where some versions of the Bible use *prove to be wrong*, others prefer old-fashioned words like *convict*, and the idea here is that as a work of grace, the Spirit tells people they are wrong about sin. Putting it more positively, if people had a correct understanding of what sin is, they would turn to Christ. The Spirit works in people’s hearts to let them know they have a sin problem, which can only be dealt with through Jesus. Jesus fulfils all of God’s purposes, and his unique identity and ministry show that he is the key to dealing with sin.

*10about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;*

The Spirit will also show the world, people who don’t know God, that it is wrong about righteousness. People may have a perception of what righteousness means, and at the time the most serious challenges to Jesus’s teaching and authority came from religious people, groups within Judaism who thought of themselves as righteous. The Spirit will show them that what they think about righteousness is wrong. Now I don’t think there are any Pharisees or teachers of the law sitting in the congregation today, but what of *our* 21st century respectability here in Stowe, located in these beautiful surroundings next to an expensive private school? I am sure that most of us here are very respectable, yet the Spirit has to work to reveal that our human and culturally-specific respectability does not equal righteousness in God’s eyes. And there’s a challenge for us, in v.10, because the Spirit will convict people about their flawed understanding of righteousness in Jesus’ *absence*. How will the world see what righteousness looks like if they can’t see Jesus? God’s people will demonstrate it and model it. Jesus is preparing his followers to receive the baton from him, of course with the assistance of the Spirit. And there is a connection to that remarkable *fruit of the Spirit* section in Galatians 5. We’ll get to that at the end.

*11and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

How about judgment, in v.11? The world is in error in its standards, its assessment of right and wrong. Jesus is splitting humanity into two groups, one which seeks to follow him and the other which follows the prince of this world. Jesus’ life and teaching have shown the total bankruptcy of fallen human values and incorrect spiritual allegiances. And his forthcoming triumphal sacrifice on the cross will continue to expose the world’s value system as useless.

So the work of the Spirit will show that humanity’s understanding of sin, righteousness, and judgement is incorrect, because it does not acknowledge the supremacy of Christ.

*12“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.*

At this late point in his ministry among his disciples, Jesus’s heart is heavy, yet even now he remains pastoral. He has been revealing many difficult things to his disciples and challenging them about dependence on him and unity. There is much more that he would like to say, but they have heard enough this evening and in fact are generally not ready for more information and understanding. Jesus has mentioned the cross to his disciples on a number of occasions but they have not yet put the pieces together, as we shall see when Jesus is arrested, Peter draws his sword, and the disciples flee to the four winds. Jesus’ teaching has been central to the lives of the disciples, and rightly so, but *we* know that the true centre of his ministry are the cross and its significance for Christian teaching and community.

*13But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

After the resurrection and the ascension, the Spirit will come to explain the significance of the cross and resurrection to the disciples. He will help them to see the big picture and understand how Jesus’s life and work were predicted in the Old Testament and fulfil and extend it. The disciples were in a kind of betwixt and between space, accepting and following Jesus, but still not fully understanding what he was all about. Their journey of understanding continues into Acts and the epistles, doesn’t it?

The Spirit will teach the disciples what is to come. This does not mean some kind of foretelling of the future. The context of the upper room discourse means that the Spirit will help the disciples make sense of the revolution that Jesus has inaugurated, with a new organism at its heart, the church.

*14He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.*

*15All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”*

The final verses show the unity in purpose and teaching of the Trinity. It has been said that God the Father is the architect of the salvation project, Jesus executed it, and the Spirit is in charge of its application to us as individuals and the church.

The Spirit teaches that it is Christ who makes all this possible and is the exemplar for redeemed humanity brings glory to Jesus. Indeed, the Spirit delights in bringing glory to the Son, and he will only teach what is in line with Jesus’s teaching and ministry, which he in turn took from the Father. The members of the Godhead have a unity of purpose and teaching which Christians should bear in mind.

In closing, let’s connect these ideas to Galatians 5. After the resurrection and ascension, as the church is growing and dealing with all kinds of issues, Paul writes to the Galatians -- and to the rest of us -- to follow the teaching of the Spirit and come under his influence.

Paul briefly contrasts good, wholesome Christian behaviour with the standards of the flesh. He contrasts the church, the Kingdom of God, with the world, which aligns neatly with our section of John 16. If the world is in error about sin because it doesn’t understand who Jesus is, it will manifest the behaviours listed in Gal 5:19-21, impurity, jealousy, rage, and so on. And of course, Christians who are not bringing themselves under the influence of the Holy Spirit risk doing the same.

*22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

The ideal character traits, the fruit of the Spirit, in vv.22-23 are a portrait of the righteous, demonstrated perfectly by Christ as a model for and expectation of us. The same verses also condemn the prince of this world as a source of negative attitudes among people who do not know God. Jesus’ comments on sin and judgment in John 16 serve as bookends, negative aspects of not understanding Christ’s ministry and sacrifice on our behalf.

But we can end on a positive note by thinking about righteousness, which in Jesus’s absence and with the help of the Holy Spirit we are to manifest as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Fruit grows on trees rooted in good soil, and perhaps here we see some echoes of John 15, which is the preamble to this chapter. We are to live in dependence on God and bear fruit for him. *Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. A pretty amazing list of wonderful attitudes and behaviours which should be found among the people of God as we testify to what Jesus has done. This is what the Holy Spirit came to teach the disciples about and which he teaches *us* about. From what Jesus has told us we know that the fruit of the Spirit is also the fruit of the Son and also the fruit of the Father. So when Gal 5:25 tells us *to keep in step with the Spirit*, it also means keeping in step with the Son, and keeping in step with the Father. And when we live in this way, bearing this fruit in relationships, we will glorify Jesus, as we read back in John 16:14.

I wish we had more time, because this is amazing stuff. Let us ask the Spirit of God to come and guide us into all truth. Amen.