

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Romans 16:12-15

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the characteristics that distinguishes all of us here from animals is our mind's ability to reflect, and to examine what we're doing and why we're doing it. Sooner or later all of us direct that kind of attention to life itself. We try to work out why we're here, or what we're alive for, and we try to form a philosophy of life of some kind that will guide us through the next 70 or 80 years. You remember, that's what we've been talking about over these past weeks, and we said that if you try to form a philosophy of life, you're driven to deal with certain big questions. And those questions, we tried to talk about.

You remember, we said that if you're trying to find out why you're alive, it's pretty important to discover whether Einstein's hypothesis is true. His hypothesis was, that there was an intelligent mind behind the universe that had planned all this and had put us here. It's pretty important to discover if that's true, because that will obviously tie up with the way you live your life or what you live it for. So, you remember over the past months we have been dealing from a purely intellectual standpoint with questions like: Is there a God? Is the Bible history or myth? Is Jesus God's Son? Why are we alive? And what I would like to do for the next few weeks is to interrupt the studies in Romans, and to try to deal a little more together with how to enter into the reality that Jesus explained to us was the meaning of life, how to enter into that reality. So, loved ones that's why I'm suggesting that we start this morning and continue maybe for a few weeks to talk about this subject that maybe not too many of us know a lot about: this ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I'd just remind you of our problem. You remember Jesus explained reality this way, he said, "In my Father's house there are many mansions, if it weren't so I wouldn't have said it, but I am going to prepare a place for you. That where I am there you may be also." You remember Jesus elaborated that through His disciples who wrote the New Testament. And their elaboration goes right along the lines of the elaboration that the prophets provided when they wrote the Old Testament. It explains clearly that our Creator made us to be His friends, made us to love Him, and in fact, more than just to be His friends -- made us to be His children. Made us to live, and to treat Him as a dear Father not only in this life -- but after the new life begins, to treat Him like that forever, and that's why we're alive here today.

Now, if you don't know what it means to treat Him as a Father, well I'd ask you to think of your own experiences with parents. I know they're kind of mixed -- some of us had Dads that we were close to, others of us had Moms that we were close to. Some of us had loved ones that we weren't close to at all; some of us haven't had parents. But the interesting thing is, that whatever our father or our mother was like, isn't it interesting that we can tell whether they're a good father or a bad father, because we have deep down in our hearts somewhere a picture of what a good father is. Isn't it interesting that we have that? Even those of us that are crazy and mixed up can still say where our Dads were right or our Dads were wrong, because we have some picture inside of what a good father would be like, and we do have the sense that a good father loves you. He provides for you, he protects you, and he makes sure you have enough food and clothing, and he looks out for you generally, and he helps you to develop your abilities. And then, he helps you to get started in life, and to find your place in the world. Maybe more than anything else when we talk about a

"father figure" we think of somebody who gives us a sense of security, and gives us a sense of esteem and worth. Above all, that somebody whose friendship makes life worthwhile.

Now that, Jesus says, is why we're here on earth, to have that kind of relationship with our Maker. To know Him like that, and to trust Him like that, and just as we used to go to good fathers when we were children, when we cut our knees, or we were scared in the dark -- so we're to go to God like that. And He will put His arms around us, and hug us and He will protect us. And in the areas where we feel we don't know our way, He will make a way for us. Jesus said, that's the way we're to live with our Father, the God who made us.

Now, of course we all know we're NOT His children -- we know that. We're creatures of God, we were made by God, Jesus was born of God, but we were created by God and so we're in relationship to Him much the same way as the family dog was to our parents you remember. The little family dog could pretend to be like the rest of us kids, and he could try sitting up at the table or begging, you know, and we said, "Ah look at him, give him some food!" Or, he could jump into bed with us and we'd pretend he's a little human being, but he wasn't a little human being. He was a creature and we were a human being; he would last 14 years at the most, we could last 70 or 80. And it didn't matter how he behaved, he still looked like a little dog trying to be a human being, and he just didn't have the characteristics that we had through being born in our mother's womb, and he didn't have the close relationship with our Mum and Dad but we had. So, he was a creature, and loved one's we're the same. Compared with Jesus, even though He says we were made to be God's children, and to treat Him as our Father, we are created beings and we are just creatures of God. You know that we find that in our own selves, we find that just as the little dog would have real trouble playing the flute, or would have real trouble reading Shakespeare, so we try again and again to behave like children of God, but it is hard, and we find we're involved in some kind of imitation that we can't keep up.

So it's very interesting here, you come to these crises moments in your life -- you lose your job, or you lose your girlfriend, or a crisis comes between you and your wife, and you know the old stomach just tenses up and tightens. You can't help that anxiety; it seems to work on you immediately, you just tense up. It's as if the old body is in charge of you, you're saying inside, "No, no I need to trust God. Even though I can't see my way through this crisis, even though I can't see how we're going to make this up in our relationship, even though I can't see how I'm going to get another job like that one, even though I can't see my way through this, I need to trust God, He is my Father, He knows the way through it." And we try to trust God, don't we?

But, boy if the old nervous system is tight in there, and you find you're almost being governed by the way your physical body responds to those crises -- you feel, "I want to do it, but I can't" and then you know what you do with the anxiety even. You go to the icebox, or the refrigerator, and you try to eat the anxiety out of you or we pop the old Valium, or something else. But it's interesting that, even though we don't want to, we end up trying to use either food, or chemicals, or drugs or other people or anything to try to get us out of the mess that we're in. We try to trust God, but it is hard isn't it? It's like a little dog trying to play Chopin. I mean it just hasn't the fingers for it, it just can't read the music, but it's banging away in some fashion and not getting any satisfaction out of it, and many of us live like that, don't we?

We know we should trust God as our Father, we know finally He's the only one who can really do everything, because we can see what He's produced in the world, but we can't do it. And so, we often feel like Paul and say, "The good that I would. The good I want to do, I can't do it, and the evil I hate -- I don't want to keep eating, and eating, and getting overweight every time I get worried or

anxious -- I don't want to use chemicals or other people or drugs to kind of quieten things down -- but that evil that I hate, that's the very thing I do."

It's the same with everything, isn't it? I mean we don't want to depend on what people think of us, but isn't it incredible how much we do, it just is you know. You know in conversation how often you find yourself -- you want to be interested in what they're saying, but your little old mind is waiting for them to pass some compliment over to you. Or, maybe they're going to say something that's going to build you up, and you don't want to be looking for that, but it's as if your whole being is made like that. Of course, the truth is we've been doing that for years. We've been depending on each other for years, instead of God. And so our being has become like that, and our personality has become that kind of personality, and in fact Paul, you remember, at the end of Romans 7 puts it very strongly. He says, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" and he felt that the personality that he had was so unsuited to trust God as his Father. So absolutely enslaved and accustomed to trusting men, and women, and things, and environment, and experience and circumstances, that it was like a body of death.

Now, I don't know if you know what a body of death is. But in the old days, if you murdered someone there were several punishments. One of them was that they took the body of the murdered person, and they tied that dying rotting body onto your body, and you had to walk about with it for as long as it took for the whole thing to fall apart and fall off you. So, you walked about with a rotting corpse attached to you, and that's what Paul meant. "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" I don't know if you've felt like that, but I think many of us have. We've wanted to trust God, we've wanted to depend on His opinion alone, and we've wanted to look up to Him for our happiness. We find that there's a kind of "body of death" that keeps working the other way round. A personality that keeps depending on people, looking out for the little bit of praise, looking out for the little bit of approval, looking out for the little bit of money that will get us out of this problem. Loved ones, that's why Jesus said, "You know, there's no other way, but for you all to be born again. That's the only thing. Because your personality is so absolutely perverted, that unless it's recreated all over again, you won't be able to treat God the way I treat Him." Jesus said, "You see me, I died on the cross, not pleading for my life from the hands of those who could have saved me. Not depending on their approval, but I died absolutely confident that my Father was going to bring me through this death, and out the other side. Now, if you're going to live that kind of way, the only way is for you to be completely remade."

You know that's what Jesus said happened in Himself. He said, "In me, my Father put your old personality, and when I died it died. And when I was resurrected there was a new personality of yours that was resurrected in me, and you were recreated in me. And that personality is like mine, and it is able to trust my Father, and it's able to look to Him alone for approval. It's able to walk free of the dominance of man fear, and of people's opinions, and that personality is available for you." And you remember his apostle Paul put it like this, he said, "You know our old self, that old self of yours that gets anxious, and gets uptight with the stomach muscles whenever the finances go wrong, or whenever a relationship goes wrong, that old self was crucified with Christ. So, that the body of sin, that body that kept reacting the old way, was destroyed, or rendered inoperative, or neutralized. So that you might no longer be enslaved to sin, that is, you might no longer be enslaved to people, and to circumstances, and to things for your security and your happiness and your sense of identity. But that you'd be able to trust God as your own dear Father." And that's the way Jesus put it all, you remember.

Now, loved ones here's the question that I'd love for you to begin to think about: If that all

happened, how is that made real in you and me today? How is that all made real in us? That sounds like the answer, but how is it made real in us today? We see that the power of positive thinking people say by autosuggestion, you know that, from all the books. "Win By Intimidation", or "I'm Okay, You're Okay" or "The Power of Positive Thinking" itself, all those books say, "By the mind, by the mind". You see, what has happened is, your mind has gotten used to manipulating people instead of understanding God. Now, you've just to change that pattern. Your emotions have got used to trying to enjoy other people, instead of trying to enjoy God and give joy to other people. Now, you've got to change that pattern, and you change it by setting your mind against it, and for the good pattern. So, there are countless "self-help" books, and it's interesting, do you know that they're all based on a vague memory that God has somehow turned the thing around. Except that they think that you make it real in your own life by the power of your mind. And of course, the lives of people who believe that attest to its failure, because you cannot reproduce the relaxed gentle Spirit of Jesus by the power of the mind.

Now, much religion, including much evangelical Christianity says, "No, not by the power of the mind, but the mind has to believe that you were crucified with Christ, and then by self-discipline, you discipline yourself to be like the new person that has been made in Jesus." You notice that both those ways really believe that nothing did change in Jesus. I mean, both of them believe that it's just a wonderful metaphor, "Ah yes, our old self was crucified with Christ, just think of it that way, just think of it that way. Just think, whenever they're criticizing you: 'No, I was crucified with Christ. I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead. I don't feel that, I don't feel it, just think that.'"

Or, whenever you begin to worry about what you're going to do next month to pay the rent, just think, "Well, I'm crucified with Christ, I'm not here, I'm not here." Loved ones, do you see that there are great realms of Christianity, and great realms of psychology -- really it's not good psychology, it's perverted psychology--that believe that either by the power of the mind, or by the power of the will, you can make this real in your life.

Now, here is the wonderful liberty that Jesus brought us. He knew fine well that you or I could not make that real in our own lives by the use of our minds or by the use of our wills. That's why He explained to the disciples. He said, "Look, I will pray the Father, and He will send you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who will be with you, and will be in you. This Spirit of truth will be a counselor to you, and He will carry on the work that I have been doing in the world. And most importantly He will make real in you the things that have happened to you in me, in eternity." That's what Jesus said. He said, "I'm not leaving you alone, I'm not leaving you desolate. It's to your advantage that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go I will send Him to you." This Counselor He called Him a "He". He called Him a He, He said, "The Holy Spirit is a person. He and I and my Father, existed together before the world was, and the Holy Spirit will be Me present in your life. And He will make real to you the things that have happened to you in my death and my resurrection."

Loved ones, I'd just like you to took a look at one verse there were Jesus says that. So, maybe you'd look at John chapter 16, and it is a good verse you know, to learn. John 16:12-15: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The word for "declare", loved ones, is from a Greek verb - "metexo" and it means "to share with you." So those verses 14 and 15 run: "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and share it with you. All that the Father has is mine. Therefore,

I said that He will take what is mine, and share it with you."

Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit will take the miracle that was wrought upon your old personality and He will share it with you. He will make it real in your life." And I think that maybe a lot of us here, maybe just because we're academically inclined, try to make these things real by the power of our mind, or the power of our will. But loved ones Jesus didn't leave us to ourselves like that. He said, "No, the Holy Spirit is my other self." C.S. Lewis called the Holy Spirit: "Jesus' other self". He's a real person, the third person of the trinity. He can think like us, He can feel like us, He can speak and He can hear us and the Holy Spirit is here, in this room and He actually is working inside you. And He alone is able to make these things real in you. That's why nothing happened in the First Century until the disciples stopped looking up at Jesus disappearing into the sky, and began to pay attention to this new Master -- the successor to Jesus, this Person, the Holy Spirit.

Loved ones, it's the same with us here you know, it really is. It doesn't matter how clearly I explain it to you. It doesn't matter what a sharp mind you have, and how clearly you can understand it. It doesn't matter how many "power of positive thinking" books you read. It doesn't matter how much willpower you use. It doesn't matter how much autosuggestion you practice. The only one who can make this miraculous change in your life, who can enable you to be born again and recreated - into a person that finds it natural to trust God, instead of to trust people first -- the only one who can do that is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised that He would come, and loved ones, really all that you see here in our ministry isn't the result of some Irish fellow who can speak. Or of a lot of Americans can give themselves to businesses, but what you see here is the creation of the dear Holy Spirit, and that Holy Spirit knows you, and He is able to make real in you the death and resurrection that took place in Jesus of your old personality and your new personality.

So, loved ones I would say to you at the beginning of these weeks, when we begin to study the ministry of the Holy Spirit, I would ask you first of all: would you do what I at last started to do? After hearing about the Holy Spirit for years, after learning about "it" -- I used to call it, "it" in theology -- I used to regard "it" as an influence that came upon a meeting, kind of an emotional thing. But, after years of that, I at last took Jesus' words seriously in John 16 that the Holy Spirit is a Person and I began to regard the Holy Spirit as a Person, and I began to stop depending on myself alone and my own introspection and my own autosuggestion to make these things real in my life, and I began to depend on the Holy Spirit, and I remember some people say, "Don't pray to the Holy Spirit." Well, maybe not, but He is talked about as the Spirit of Jesus. At the beginning I simply said, "Holy Spirit, I have made no inroads into making this miracle real in my own life. Holy Spirit, will you begin to lead me in this? Will you begin to show me what I have to do, how I have to respond, or how I have to act in order for you to make this miracle of the new, birth real in me? Where I cease to be enslaved to people, and circumstances, and things, and I begin to be able to treat my God as my own Father." Loved ones, if you will honor the Holy Spirit, if you will respect Him, instead of trying to remain God of your own personal experience, if you will respect Him and begin to listen to Him, and do what He says, you'll begin to see the miracle taking place in you.

So that's why I think it is probably important for us, during these next weeks, just to talk about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So that you, yourself, will see that God has made provision for the actualizing of this in your life today. And it isn't simply up to the power of your mind and the

power of your will, it's a matter of cooperating in both of those areas with this dear Holy Spirit, who is Jesus' successor. Somebody said it this way, "He's like the Executor of Jesus' will." Jesus left to us a life of power, and a life where we could trust God. The Holy Spirit is the one who deals that out to us, and who gives it to us. He is the Executor of Jesus' will, He makes it real in us. So, if you haven't thought of Him that way, will you begin to think of Him that way? So that you see that you have a real friend inside you, who actually knows you better than you know yourself, and can go deeper than you can go. Let us pray.

Dear Spirit of Jesus, we believe that you will not bear witness to yourself. We believe that you will glorify Jesus, and so, we believe that we can trust you to hear our prayers. We do believe Jesus' words, that you are here, and that you are actually in us and that any movements towards God -- even that brought us to this place this morning -- are due to your movement within us. Holy Spirit, we don't know how to make these things real in us, but we believe that that's why you were sent. So, we would begin to recognize you, and acknowledge you in our lives, and we will begin to obey you and respond to you. Holy Spirit, we would ask you to lead us in this area, where we cannot lead ourselves, and we would ask you most of all to make us God's children. So that we can trust Him from our hearts. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.