

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

January 3, 2016

“Our Inheritance: The Spirit”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister
Velna Pitts: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

*26701 McCall Boulevard,
Menifee, California 92586
(951) 679-1149*

Email: uccmenifee@gmail.com

Website: menifeeucc.org

Following Jesus

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE

John 1:11-17

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE:

Ephesians 1:11-14

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

“Our Inheritance: The Spirit”

An elderly lady was sitting on a plane next to the Pope. Suddenly a storm formed, and the plane was being tossed around. So the lady said to the Pope, “Can’t you do something about this?” The Pope said, “Sorry, lady. I’m in sales, not management.”

Christians believe management consists of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Maybe we have some idea who God is - the Creator

of the Universe, the Alpha and the Omega, all that is seen and unseen - and who Jesus is - the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, the Prince of Peace - but who or what is the Holy Spirit?

When I was a kid, maybe seven years old, I was playing in my front yard alone. All of a sudden I didn't feel alone. I felt like there was something or someone there with me. Was that God? Was that Jesus? Or was that the Holy Spirit? (As a Trinitarian, the correct answer is: Yes.)

Have you ever experienced the spirit or the Holy Spirit? What was that like? Was it a feeling? Was it a voice? Was it a vision? The Bible tells us that Jesus promised us the spirit, or the Holy Spirit, as a present.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus left us, he left us with a gift. The gift of our inheritance: The Spirit. The Holy Spirit. It's been a gift that's kept on giving for millennia. Paul tells us about our inheritance in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul tells us that we were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. And Paul tells us that with this inheritance of the Holy Spirit we are redeemed as God's own people. And John tells us of this gift in his Gospel. John tells us that if we believe in Jesus, then we become children of God. And John tells us we're born, not of blood, or of the flesh, or of the will of humans, but we're born of God. And I believe we're born with the gift of God and the gift of Jesus, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek and Hebrew words for spirit also mean breath and wind. So I believe every time we breathe in we take in the Holy Spirit. And I believe every time we feel the wind on our face, we're experiencing the Holy Spirit.

There's a difference between the soul and the spirit. I believe the soul is always within us. I believe the soul is what keeps us grounded. I believe the soul is like the sand in the bottom of

those plastic clowns that you punched as a kid, maybe, and they fell backwards and then they bounced back up, because of the sand in the bottom of them. (I think it was sand.) I believe our soul helps us to bounce back up when life knocks us down. And I believe our soul gets lifted up to heaven when we die. That's the soul.

The Holy Spirit is different. I believe the Holy Spirit is the umbilical cord that connects our soul to God and Jesus. I believe the Holy Spirit also connects our soul to other souls. I believe that's how soul mates are connected; their souls are connected by the Holy Spirit between them. That's the Holy Spirit or the Spirit.

Khalil Gibran, the Lebanese American poet, speaks of the Spirit, but Christians would probably take it to mean that he's speaking of the Holy Spirit. Khalil Gibran proclaims, "I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons [and daughters] of one religion, and it is the spirit." I've quoted that statement by Khalil Gibran before. But it's appropriate to quote him again today, because of what we're going to be doing in worship this month, beginning next week. It has to do with interfaith understanding.

Next Sunday, during our Worship Service, I'll have a discussion with a rabbi about Judaism. It's the kick off of our interfaith understanding month. Then on January 24, I'll talk during our Worship Service with a Muslim about Islam. And on January 31 I'll talk during our Worship Service with a Buddhist about Buddhism. You'll be able to ask questions of all these folks, too. The hope is that we'll generate more light than heat, and understand each other a little better. And maybe understand the Spirit a little better, too.

I preached a sermon once in seminary called, "The Holy Trinity or The Divine Duo?" It was about how we remember God and

Jesus, but we often forget about the Holy Spirit. That's why I often conclude the prayers I say by saying, "By the power of the Holy Spirit. And in the name of Jesus. Amen." I want to remember the Holy Spirit. And I want you to remember the Holy Spirit. After that sermon in seminary, one of my professors said to me: we just don't know what to do with the Spirit, because we can't fit the Spirit into a box, the way we can fit God and Jesus into a box. Well, maybe we can fit the Spirit into a box, but then we forget about the box.

But there's no escaping the Spirit. You can ignore the Spirit. But you can't escape from the Spirit. The Spirit will track you down. The Spirit will speak to you from the song that you're listening to on the radio or on iTunes. The Spirit will speak to you from the news story that you're watching on TV or on your iPhone. Or maybe the spirit will speak to you in the middle of the night.

I got a call the other day from a woman who said she was a writer who wanted to interview me about my support for Syrian refugees. So we met at Starbucks. She said she woke up in the middle of the night and the Holy Spirit told her to contact Bill Freeman. Wow. I didn't know the Holy Spirit would whisper my name to someone in the middle of the night. She gave me an article she wrote. I noticed at the bottom of the article it said that she writes for Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network's 700 Club. Bells started going off in my head. I began to wonder what this woman really wanted.

America has millions of "illegal immigrants" already, she said. And now I - the guy the Holy Spirit told her to contact - want to bring millions more people here illegally. I told her that the Syrian refugees wouldn't be here illegally. They're fleeing oppression and death in Syria, they'd be checked out by Homeland Security, and President Obama says we won't take in millions of Syrian refugees, only 10,000 of them. She said

President Obama isn't a Christian, he's a Muslim. I told her, "No. He's a Christian, in the same denomination that I'm in, the United Church of Christ." I believe she gasped.

President Obama can't be a Christian, she said, because he put rainbow colors on the White House when the Supreme Court allowed same-sex marriages. I told her my church has a rainbow banner on the side of our building and that I've performed 49 same-sex weddings. She said, "Then you don't believe Jesus when he called homosexuality an abomination." I told her, "Jesus never said one word about homosexuality." She said it says it in Leviticus, and that Jesus inspired the whole Bible, and God's Word is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I told her Jesus changed the Bible. Jesus said you can do good on the Sabbath, even though the Bible says you can't do anything on the Sabbath. She said Jesus can do that, because he's Jesus. I told her we can do the same thing, because we follow Jesus. She closed her eyes. I assumed she was praying: Get thee behind me, Satan.

When I realized she wasn't going to write an article about me, she just wanted to change my mind about Syrian refugees, I left Starbucks. Afterwards I thought: Maybe I opened her mind a little bit. Maybe that's why the Holy Spirit told her to contact me. So that I could open her closed mind just a little bit. Or maybe the Holy Spirit will get her to change her mind just a little bit by moving in her heart, like it says in the hymn.

"Every Time I Feel The Spirit," the hymn we sing says, "Every time I feel the spirit moving in my heart, I will pray." We should all do that, not just the woman I met in Starbucks. I believe if we do, there'll be a whole lot of praying going on, because I believe the Spirit is always moving in our hearts, we just have to pay attention to it. And that's something we should do all the time. Not just when we're in church singing hymns about the Spirit.

I don't wear a robe in church. The reason I don't wear a robe in church is because I don't want people to think that I'm the Minister of this church for only one hour a week, when I'm wearing my robe. I want people to remember that I'm the minister of this church 24/7/365, even if I don't have a robe on. I want people to see me as the minister of this church for the hour a week that I'm in worship, then afterwards in the sermon talk back, then when I'm in my office during the week, then when I'm in a council meeting, then when I'm at home, and even when I'm at Starbucks. And I want to see myself that way, too. I don't want to think of myself as the minister of this church for only one hour a week, when I have my robe on. I want to remember - myself - that I'm the minister of this church 24/7/365. That's why I don't wear a robe for one hour a week in church.

The Spirit is the same way. The Spirit is not just with us for one hour a week when we're in church. The spirit is with us 24/7/365. The Spirit is with us when we're in church, when we're at the grocery store, and when we're driving on the 215. That's because Jesus gave us the Spirit, the Holy Spirit - part of the management team - as our inheritance, as a gift, as a present, to be always present with us.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to feel the Spirit.
Help us to hear the Spirit.
And help us to see the Spirit.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

THE GOLDEN RULE

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*
Christianity

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*
Judaism

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*
Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*
Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*
Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*
Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*
Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*
Humanism