The Spirit's Power for Mission Nov. 23, 2025
6 of 6 in *The Holy Spirit Series: Gospel of John Edition* John 20:19-23

What does it feel like when someone gives you a job that's clearly "above your pay grade," so to speak?

Maybe it's your boss handing you a project that's way beyond your experience level. Or a teacher giving you an assignment that's so far over your head you have no idea where to start. Or perhaps a pastor invites you to lead a ministry and suddenly you feel completely out of your depth.

In such a situation, your first reaction might be panic: *"I can't do this!"* And in your mind, you start running through all the reasons you're not the right person — not smart enough, not talented enough, not prepared enough.

But then, imagine that the same boss or teacher or pastor who gave you this seemingly impossible task looks you in the eye and says: "I know it's big — but you're not doing this alone. I'll give you everything you need. You have my full backing."

That's more or less the kind of moment the disciples are having in the passage we just read.

They're huddled behind locked doors, terrified and uncertain. Their leader has been crucified. Their movement looks finished. And suddenly, Jesus — *alive* — stands among them and says, "Peace be with you… As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

What a staggering statement! The Father sent Jesus — the eternal Son, the One who healed the sick, forgave sins, raised the dead, revealed the very heart of God. And now *that same mission* is being handed to them? It's not just above their pay grade — it's beyond their comprehension.

But then Jesus does something: He *breathes on them* and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

It's as if he's saying, "You're right — you could never do this on your own. But you're not on your own. My Spirit —my very breath, my life — will be in you."

And that changes everything. The same Spirit that filled *him* will now fill *them.*

Yes, their mission is God-sized — but so is the power behind it.

And that, my friends, is exactly where we find ourselves as a church. These last couple of years, Cornerstone has been in a season of prayer and discernment — seeking God's direction for our longer-term future. What's the picture that's emerging, you ask?

Well, next Sunday, our Executive Team will unpack that picture for you. It's a picture consistent with who we've always been as a church, and it's also consistent the needs of the greater community around us—growing needs that God is calling us to respond to for his kingdom's sake. It's a calling that goes well beyond what we can do in our own strength. And that's very much the point.

Because as he did with his first disciples, Jesus is once again inviting Cornerstone into a new era of mission that's "above our pay grade." He intends to accomplish it *through* us, *by the power of the Holy Spirit*.

This is one of the main reasons why God has been leading us to focus on the person and work of the Holy Spirit as we get ready to move into the future God has for us as a church.

Who is the Holy Spirit? Well, Christians believe that the one true God exists in a loving community of three divine persons called the Trinity—*Father*, *Son* and *Holy Spirit*. So, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—not a vague force or distant power but the personal presence of God himself, active in the world, in the church, and in the hearts of all who follows Jesus.

We've come to the final installment of our series about the person and work of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel. In today's scripture passage, Jesus offers **three gifts to equip his followers for a mission far beyond their own strength**. These gifts are as much for us as his disciples today as they were for his disciples then. Let's take a look at them now, starting with the gift of:

1. Peace Restored – Jesus Meets Us in Our Fear

> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you…" [1]

It's the evening of Easter Sunday. That very morning, Jesus—crucified just three days prior—had risen from the dead. But his disciples are hiding behind locked doors. Fear still rules their hearts. They're afraid that the same Jewish leaders who had plotted their Lord's execution would now be coming for them.

Suddenly, the risen Jesus stands among them. And it seems that he hasn't come through the doors in normal fashion. Indeed, the text says "with the doors locked… Jesus came and stood among them." How? John does not say, although it's very clear that Jesus does not appear to them as a disembodied spirit—a ghost. To the contrary, Jesus makes a point of showing the disciples his pierced hands and side. Later in this very same chapter, Jesus invites Thomas to *touch* his hands and side. And in Luke's gospel, we find the risen Jesus eating a piece of broiled fish. [2]

So, Jesus stands among these disciples with a resurrection *body* that was clearly *physical*, and yet somehow not limited by a set of locked doors.

And Jesus meets these disciples *in their fear*. Notice what Jesus *doesn't* do in the process: he doesn't chastise them for being afraid, nor condemn them for their earlier failures. What he *does* is offer them *peace*. And as if he knows they need extra reassurance, he does so *twice*. As John puts it:

[1] John 20:19-21a (NIV)
[2] John 20:24-29; Luke 24:42-43

> Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" … Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you…" [3]

It's true that this was a standard Hebrew greeting. But here, twice repeated, it means infinitely more. It was the fulfillment of his earlier promise to them—and to us—in John chapter 14, where Jesus said:

> "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." [4]

And again, in John 16, where Jesus said:

> I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world." [5]

The peace Jesus offers is the *shalom* of God's kingdom—it's about restored relationship with God and with each other; it's about wholeness and well-being. It's a peace that he won through his sacrificial love evidenced in the wounds on his hands and side. It's a peace Jesus wants to bring to the whole world—the whole created order. The disciples—including you and me—are to be messengers of this peace. But first we must be restored by the peace he died and rose again to make possible.

You see, **the peace Jesus offers isn't the absence of trouble but the presence of the risen Lord who meets us in our fear.**

Maybe you find yourself behind your own "locked doors" of fear today—fear of the future, fear of failure, fear of being hurt again, fear of what obedience to Jesus might cost. And as a church, we face our own uncertainties: questions about space, about growth, about God's challenging call to go deeper in discipleship even as we reach wider into our community. It's easy for fear to whisper, "What if we can't? What if we're not enough?"

But the risen Jesus stands in our midst. He doesn't wait for us to have everything sorted out. He doesn't scold us for being afraid. He simply says, "Peace be with you." The question isn't whether he wants to give us peace—*he does.* The question is whether we will open our lives, and our church's future, to the presence of the risen One who has already stepped into the room.

We're looking at three gifts Jesus offers to equip his followers for a mission far beyond their own strength. The first is Peace Restored. The second is the sacred privilege of a:

2. Calling Given – "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You" [6]

The peace Jesus offers his disciples isn't meant to settle them into a comfortable complacency; it's meant to propel them into the world.

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[3] John 20:19b, 21a (NIV)
[4] John 14:27 (NIV); the Holy Spirit is promised in 14:25-26
[5] John 16:33 (NIV)
[6] John 20:21b

Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus is described as the One *sent* by God. And in this solemn moment on that first Easter Sunday evening, Jesus calls his disciples be part of the world-restoring mission that's been set into motion through his life, death and resurrection.

Their mission—and by extension ours—proceeds from *his*. As New Testament scholar Leon Morris explains:

> It is only because [Jesus] has thus accomplished his mission that [the disciples] are sent into the world. The link between his mission and theirs is emphasized. [7]

We see this same emphasis in John 17, when Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples:

> As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. [8]

This extends to you, me, and anyone who is a follower of Jesus. So, every follower of Jesus in the house and online today, would you please repeat after me:

> **We are sent people!**
>
> **I'm a sent person!**

Being sent people is part of our identity as followers of Jesus, and as a church. It's who we are. Because the church doesn't exist for the sake of the church. The church exists for the sake of the world, into which God first sent Jesus, and into which Jesus now sends us.

Our calling is not to remain cloistered behind church doors, but to fling open our doors to the wider community in Jesus' name, and also to head out of those doors and into the places where we live, work and play every day, to embody the good news of Jesus to our neighbours.

What did Jesus say? He said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." How did the Father send Jesus?

John tells us right from the opening chapter of his Gospel: God sent his Son to be *embodied* among us. *The Message* translation captures this well:

> The Word became flesh and blood,
> and moved into the neighborhood. [9]

In Jesus, God's world-restoring work took on skin and bone. He "moved into the neighborhood," as it were, entering our world with real presence, real proximity, and real humanity. In Jesus, God got up close and personal, tangibly, in the flesh.

And as the Father has sent Jesus, Jesus now sends us. He calls us to "move into the neighbourhood," bringing his loving presence into the community where he's placed us as a church, and also into the places where we live, work, play, and attend school.

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[7] Morris, p. 747.
[8] John 17:18 (NIV)
[9] John 1:14a (MSG)

Jesus continues his mission through his embodied people—through us—the church. As 16th century Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila so beautifully put it:

> Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
> Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world.
> Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
> Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Next week when the Executive Team shares about God's longer-term direction for Cornerstone, one of the things we'll talk about is how Jesus is sending us into the neighbourhood afresh. It's something that's been part of this church's DNA since the beginning, and it's the reason why this facility is designed to be more like a community centre than a traditional church building.

Perhaps in hearing this renewed calling to join God in the community, some of us find ourselves back with the disciples on that first Easter evening, afraid, wanting to hide behind locked doors.

If so, it's a good time to remember that Jesus' first words to his disciples as he stood among them that evening were, "Peace be with you."

It's also a good time to remember *who it is that is sending us*—who it is that entrusts us with such a calling. It's *Jesus*: "As the Father has sent me, *I am sending you*."

I'm reminded of how few years ago, Cornerstone's Executive Church Board asked me to pray about stepping into the role of Lead Pastor, as Pastor Andrew was preparing to transition out of that position after many years of faithful service. I sought the Lord earnestly in prayer, and discussed the opportunity with my wife and my spiritual director. After a season of discernment, I had a clear sense that Jesus was calling me to become Cornerstone's next Lead Pastor.

Why would I take on such a hard role? It wasn't because I was chasing a promotion or a title—not to suggest that I'm immune to such vanities. It definitely wasn't because the role would be easy—far from it. In the end, the only reason I could say yes was that *Jesus himself was asking me to do it*.

Isn't the same true for all of us? What gives us the courage to step into our God-given callings—whether in our personal lives or as a church—isn't our confidence, strength, or sense of personal readiness. It's the fact that Jesus himself calls us.

The risen Jesus stands among us even now, speaking the same words he spoke that first Easter evening: "Peace be with you… As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

But Jesus doesn't just *send* his disciples — he *empowers* them. That brings us to the third, and most critical gift that Jesus offers his followers to equip them for a mission far beyond their own strength. The gift of:

3. Power Bestowed – "Receive the Holy Spirit"

Jesus had said to his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. [10]

The Greek word translated "breathed" intentionally echoes the creation account in Genesis, where God breathes life into Adam. John deepens this connection by telling us that this happens on "the first day of the week"— a deliberate reminder of the first day of creation itself. [11]

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's declaring that in him a new creation has dawned. As God once breathed life into humanity, the risen Jesus now breathes his Spirit—the Holy Spirit—into his followers, re-creating them so that his work of making all things new can move outward through them to the world.

If you know your New Testament, you may notice a key difference between John and Luke. Luke waits until after Jesus' ascension to show the Spirit coming at Pentecost, empowering the church for its mission. John, by contrast, places the giving of the Spirit *right on Easter evening*. Pentecost will expand and amplify it, but John wants us to see how Jesus breathes his Spirit into the disciples' fear and uncertainty—transforming them from hiding followers into empowered missionaries.

Many Christians today think of a "Spirit-filled" church as a church with vibrant worship services, enthusiastic praise, and charismatic displays. And don't get me wrong—those things matter. They absolutely have their place.

But in our focus on those things, we can easily miss the fact that a truly Spirit-filled church is active not only in its g*athered* worship, but especially in its *scattered* worship—living out Jesus' mission in everyday life, spreading rumors of new creation through our words, deeds, and presence wherever he has placed us.

The Holy Spirit empowers every follower of Jesus not to experience personal spiritual thrills but to continue his work in the world—to bring God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is what Jesus has in mind when he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you," followed by, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus goes on to say to his disciples in verse 23:

> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. [12]

To be clear, Jesus isn't giving his disciples *personal* power to decide who gets forgiven and who doesn't. Rather, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he sends them—and us—to proclaim God's forgiveness to the world—a forgiveness made possible only through the cross and resurrection of Christ. At the same time, we are to warn the world of the dangers of rejecting God's gracious offer of forgiveness. That's what this verse is calling us to.

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[10] John 20:22 (NIV)
[11] Genesis 2:7; John 20:19
[12] John 20:23 (NIV)

A central part of the church's mission, then, is to bring the message of God's forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace in Jesus to a fractured world —as we embody the reality of new creation.

As I wind this message down, I'd like to share a quote from pastor and author Tyler Staton from his recent book *The Familiar Stranger*, which is all about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He writes:

> It seems that the risen Messiah is aware that we will forever be tempted to go on our own strength, relying on our own power, rather than being empowered by the Spirit… The ministry of Jesus, energized by human willpower rather than the Holy Spirit, always results in pain. We may be well-intentioned, but the renewal of the world requires a greater wisdom than the human imagination and a greater power than human effort. [13]

As Cornerstone moves into the future that God has for us, we must not attempt to go into that future in our own strength, relying on our own power. At the same time, we must not hide from that future in fear, locking the doors to what God wants to do through us. Instead, we must be filled afresh by the power of the Holy Spirit, because the renewal of this world—including the renewal of our local community—requires a power infinitely greater than our own. It requires the power of the Holy Spirit.

Which is why Jesus says to his first disciples, and to us, "As the Father sent me, I am sending you… Receive the Holy Spirit."

Of course, every true follower of Jesus has already received the Holy Spirit. Scripture exhorts us, however, *to keep on being filled* with the Spirit. [14] So, at the end of today's service, alongside a time of prayer for personal needs, we'll also offer a special opportunity for anyone who desires to come forward to one of these tables to receive a small anointing of oil on your forehead.

You see, the Holy Spirit is pictured throughout Scripture as wind or breath, water, fire, dove—and oil. God made us embodied beings, and he takes that seriously. Just as the risen Jesus showed his hands and side to the disciples and breathed on them, God often provides us with tangible means to point us to his presence and power. That's what this anointing with oil is intended to be.

It's not magic, and those doing the anointing are simply everyday brothers and sisters in Christ like any of us. But there is something deeply impactful about getting up out of your seat and doing something physical, something embodied—more than simply staying seated, whispering a private prayer, or mentally agreeing that you need more of the Spirit. This is a visible, intentional way of responding to God's invitation to be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit.

It's also a way to say, "Holy Spirit, I need you, and I want more of your fullness. Do your renewing work in my life, and make me more like Jesus." As well, it's a way for us to say together, "Holy Spirit, WE need you. We need your power for the mission you're calling us to as a church family."

I'll be back at the end of the service to say a few more words about how our time of anointing and prayer is going to work, but for now, may we pray?

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[13] Tyler Staton, *The Familiar Stranger: (Re)Introducing the Holy Spirit to Those in Search of an Experiential Spirituality*, 157.
[14] Ephesians 5:18