

**2019-05-26 (8.00am) Ali Cooper**  
**Easter 6: John 14:23-29**

It's easy to forget sometimes that the life of the Spirit is to do with the coming together of our human experience and endeavour and the spiritual realm, in which it is immersed. We are very practical beings - love as I have loved you - and we think of all the useful, matter-of-fact ways in which we can live this out. We can overlook the involvement that Jesus said we should expect from the Spirit of God, that will bring the insight and vigour needed.

But Jesus makes it quite clear that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, is the one who can change our hearts by teaching us everything we need to know in order to be 'useful' for the Lord. The gifts of the Spirit that we read about in the letter to the Galatians, are talked about in terms of the 'fruits' of the Spirit, recognisable human virtues, (gentleness, love, generosity), that are born through a willing transparency of heart and an openness to allow the Spirit of God to bring about changes to the way in which we function in our lives of faith.

But for some reason if we stray into the land of the spiritual world, we can get nervous. The term 'spirituality' is used very loosely these days to cover a multitude of life-styles and attitudes. But if you were to go to say the African continent, as indeed some of our friends from this Diocese have at the moment, we find that there are people there for whom the idea of the Holy Spirit is the most natural thing in the world. This is how God lives in our hearts, through God's Spirit, moving and inspiring us, hence calling us to action or granting peace. How else could God's presence be experienced, they might say?

Perhaps then it is a matter of language. We believe the same as our African brothers and sisters, but here we may think it is only the more charismatic churches that speak of the power of the Spirit moving one to act, to give, to worship with joy, although quietly this is true for us too. We may find ourselves a little inhibited in how we express that.

Another obstacle may be our perception (not sure how else to put it), that we wonder if the Spirit is the opposite of all that is concrete and real to us - bodily, natural, physical. We talk in terms of the material versus the Spiritual, instead of seeing them both as an intrinsic part of our make up as Christians - no, more than that, as human beings.

It's easy to speak of God in anthropomorphic terms - we see Jesus as being in God's image, so as a human figure - male or female, mother, father, but I much prefer the open image of Creator. Any image we have of God is limited and these human pictures we use, as indeed did Jesus to help us understand our relationship with God, are useful, but may encourage us to overlook sometimes that God is not human, but mystery, Spirit, other...

Many different ways the Spirit may move within us, may speak to us. Last week in the reading from Acts, Peter had a vision. This week, so does Paul. Something like this could be true for us too, really, but I think I come back to the movement of our hearts and thoughts when we see or hear or pray something that in-spires us, that speaks to us of a change or a risk to be taken, or as a gift of the beauty of the Holy Spirit stirring up life around us and so within us.

This dimension of God that we can be so shy about, is a promise from Jesus, that the Spirit's presence in our midst is what will make us more alive and relevant for our world today. Amen.