

God moves in Mysterious Ways

John 16:7-14, Eph 4:1-7

She moves in mysterious ways...Friends, the writer of this song has written some mysterious lyrics. Listening to the song you wonder what it's speaking about.

“Johnny take a walk in the rain, Johnny take a dive”...are these metaphorical references to baptism, is Johnny a reference to John the Baptist? Is “she” an allusion to the Holy Spirit, is “kissing the sky and learning to kneel” a description of communing with God through prayer?

With our Christian background it's easy to read these interpretations into the lyrics. Knowing that the musicians who wrote it come out of a strong Irish Catholic upbringing might also influence us to think this way.

But those who don't have a Christian background find quite different meaning in the lyrics. They believe it's talking about love, relationships or sexual innuendo.

Friends, interpreting lyrics is a mysterious undertaking. But that is part of what makes up good poetry and good lyrics.

The meaning isn't blatantly obvious right away. There are plays on words, double entendre, clever use of metaphors, subtlety and depth, and this enables the lyrics to touch the listener at a heart level, some might even say on a spiritual level.

And the term “spiritual” certainly enjoys a great deal of use in our society today. And just like the lyrics of our song the term “spiritual” has many different interpretations as well. It can mean anything from “an inspiring experience” all the way to supernatural phenomena, things which defy scientific explanation, and things of faith – things which we also call “mysterious”

Hence the title of the song - She moves in mysterious ways...and why we might think it's a reference to something spiritual.

Interesting isn't it, how we connect spiritual things with mystery? But we should know that when we say something is a mystery, it doesn't mean that is puzzling or confusing or vague – although that's how we tend to use the word mystery in our vocabulary.

Mystery means something that is hidden, something we can't see – unless it is revealed to us. So our car's engine is a mystery to us, doesn't mean we don't or can't understand it – it's just hidden under the hood. Open up the hood and the mystery is revealed, you can see the engine and its different parts.

And friends – whatever else you might attribute to the word spiritual, it also describes that which is hidden from us. Often times we can only see the results of something spiritual taking place, as a flag would blow in the breeze, or the sails of a ship would catch the wind.

And in our texts today we learn about some of the results that come from the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

How he works is often mysterious, it's hidden from us, we can't see it happening, it goes on behind the scenes – but the results occur and so we know the Holy Spirit is at work.

And that is why we confess – **I believe in the Holy Spirit** as part of the Apostle's Creed.

Friends, has anyone ever tried to explain to you why it is that you are a Christian? I used to get that all the time when I was growing up – people would say to me, “oh you're just a Christian because you grew up in a Christian home” and even today when people ask me why I became a minister I'm hesitant to tell them my father was a minister, lest they think I'm simply following in the family business.

It's common for people to think that religious or faith results can be explained through reason, logic, psychology, biology or sociology – in other words human or created explanations.

But when we confess that we believe in the Holy Spirit we are stating that we don't believe this, instead we believe that our religion, **our faith is authored by the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.**

As Ephesians 2:8 says: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

You see Friends, as important as Jesus is to the Christian faith, without the work of the Holy Spirit none of us would actually be here today.

That's why Jesus said to his disciples in the passage we read today *"it is for your good that I am going away, unless I go away the Advocate will not come to you!" (John 16:7)*

...The Advocate... or you could say the Campaigner, or the Activist, someone who dedicated to a particular cause...

And the cause will be, as Jesus describes, to prove the world wrong in their beliefs about sin, righteousness and judgment.

Because if you look at the life of Jesus while he was successful in living as a faithful covenant partner with God on our behalf – he came up way short in the PR department.

True he had crowds of people following him, but when push came to shove they turned on him, crucified him and deserted him. In the end it was a dozen or so disciples and a handful of women who were still hanging on, in a rather depressed state, when the resurrection happened.

But convincing large amounts of people wasn't really the work that Christ was sent to do. **That's what Christ was going to send the Advocate to accomplish – that is the work of the Holy Spirit.**

I believe in the Holy Spirit is also then to say we believe that as God the Father sent the Son to fulfill the covenant, the Son also sends the Holy Spirit. Thus as we explored last week how Jesus was equal to the Father, so the Holy Spirit is equal to Jesus and thus is also equal to God.

All three persons are equally and fully God, but at the same time distinct and have distinct focus of the work which they do.

So, the work of the **Holy Spirit will be to prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment**, helpful for us to know this as we go about our task of making disciples... as we undergo the process of becoming disciples, because we come up against all sorts of opinions about what sin, righteousness and judgment are all about don't we?

Sin...what's that? Sin...well that's doing something that you believe is wrong, because we define what's right and wrong. Sin...well as long as you don't hurt anybody you can do what you like. Sin...that's what the church uses to make you feel guilty and manipulate you...

Righteousness...I guess that would be doing things that are right?
Being a good moral person who puts others ahead of themselves?
Maybe following the golden rule – do unto others as you would want them to do to you?

Judgment...doesn't the bible say we're not supposed to judge others? I wouldn't want to be a judgmental person, who am I to judge anyways?

The good news friends is that the Holy Spirit moves in mysterious ways...behind the scenes, hidden from our sight he is advocating, making a case for the truth about sin, righteousness and judgment in the lives of those around us.

So as Jesus says in our passage, "*with regards to sin – because people do not believe in me.*" (vs. 9)

Friends, whatever people might think sin is – it is first and foremost an offense against God, it is worshiping the creation instead of the creator, it is being rebellious and disloyal to Him, it is living as if you don't need Him or what He provides for you.

Friends, God has provided his son Jesus Christ as the means by which we can receive forgiveness and live vicariously as faithful covenant partners through him, until the day when we are transformed.

To ignore, or disbelieve this provision from God is now the greatest offense that a human can commit against the Almighty, and it is the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit to bring people to a point in their lives where they can recognize this and repent from it.

And Jesus continues on "*with regards to righteousness – because I am going to the Father*" (vs. 10)

Friends, remember last week the Jews persecuted and wanted to kill Jesus – and eventually did, because He claimed God as His Father, and they saw this claim as blasphemous and rebellious. Because for a human to claim they are God is to usurp God's position, and commit the ultimate expression of rebellion against God. And if Jesus was simply a human, they would be right. However in the bible – the term "righteousness" is best understood as "acting loyally." So Jesus' claim that God was His Father was not a rebellious act, but one of loyalty – after all, the

Father had sent the son to accomplish His work and Jesus had done that faithfully – all the way to his death.

Friends, it is the mysterious work of **the Holy Spirit to help us believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be, God's Son** – that in claiming to be equal to God he was not rebelling against God (as Muslims and Jews would believe) but he was 100% loyal... righteous, and that as proof... Jesus has returned to be with His Father.

And finally as Jesus said "*regarding judgment – because the prince of this world now stands condemned*" (vs. 11)

Ultimately friends, **life is about two kingdoms and which one claims your allegiance**, the Kingdom of this World or the Kingdom of Heaven.

Those who belong to the Kingdom of this World are those who rebel against God the Creator, those who claim the prerogative for themselves to decide what is right and wrong, those who refuse to acknowledge or thank God for His blessings, who truly believe they do not need God and can sustain their lives without Him.

And their leader is the prince of this world, Lucifer - the one who first rebelled against the Creator and is destined for destruction, and as the saying goes – misery loves company.

But Christ has overcome the consequence of our rebellion – He has defeated death, He has opened a way for those who wish to leave the Kingdom of this World to defect to the Kingdom of Heaven so that when judgment day comes they will be on the winning side. The kingdom of this World will be defeated – their rebellion will have proved futile – the prince of this world stands condemned, and there will be a new world, a new heavens and a new earth.

Friends, it is the mysterious work of the **Holy Spirit which leads people to pledge their allegiance** to the Kingdom of Heaven and leave behind the Kingdom of this World, and to change from rebellion to obedience and become loyal subjects of Christ our Lord and King.

And ever since Christ sent the Holy Spirit as the Advocate on Pentecost, He has been working mysteriously in our world to

accomplish His work and we can see the result - **it is the Holy Catholic Church,** or the Holy Universal Church.

It is all those from all times and places who have been convinced by the Spirit with regards to sin, righteousness and judgment. It includes men and women, young and old, people from every tribe and tongue and nation, from the past, from the present and those who are yet to come in the future.

And the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in each of their lives means that they are being made Holy – they are saints, set apart from the Kingdom of this World for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Friends maybe you didn't know this but if the Spirit is mysteriously working in your life – not necessarily miraculously but definitely mysteriously – then you are a saint!

And that gives us a common unity – a unity which transcends culture, language, and even time, so we say – the common unity...or the **communion of the saints.**

As we read from our passage in Ephesians, this is an important connection and deserves that we make an effort to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to preserve it.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3)

Because, the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit is an ongoing process in our lives and there are times when our old nature, our sinful nature still wants to rebel and rejoin the kingdom of this world.

But, as Ephesians 4:2 says *the Holy Spirit gives us grace and makes us humble and gentle and patient and able to bear with each other in love.*

And so we say that "**we believe in the forgiveness of sins**" – not only our sin before God but we also believe we can forgive each other, since Christ forgave us – but remember...this too is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.

And finally friends - we say that we believe in **the resurrection of the body and in the life everlasting.**

Ultimately the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine is going to result in our bodies being resurrected from the dead. Just as Jesus Christ was resurrected, we too shall be brought to life through death.

Now please realize that anyone can have a near death experience, you know,...those instances where someone actually dies (*they go on Oprah tell their story about seeing the bright light or something*) but then somehow they come back to life – but eventually one day they will pass after all they are still mortal. This isn't resurrection its resuscitation.

But only Christ has died and been resurrected to the life ***everlasting!*** And one day through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit we shall pass through death to an immortal life – an everlasting life. As Paul says in Romans 8:11 -

¹¹ *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)*

Friends, the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways....that is to say while the mechanics of how He works to convince us about sin,

righteousness and judgment are hidden, and while we might not be able to see the bonds that connect us together as the church, and in spite of the fact that we have yet to experience our resurrection – **we *can see* the results.**

So we say...I believe in the Holy Spirit
In the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of Saints
The forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
And the life everlasting.
Amen.