

JUNE 7, 2026

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON "Holy Spirit" Acts 19:4-6, Matt. 3:16-17, 1 Pet 1:20-21, Rom 8:26-27, 1 Cor 12:1-6*

Last week was Pentecost. So, though a week late, today we are taking some time with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is that person in the Trinity that in many ways seems to get pushed to the extremes. Either there isn't enough acknowledgment of the Spirit, OR the Spirit is everything in the tradition. Either way misses the significance the Holy Spirit brings in our day to day, moment to moment lives.

Our language often shows how the Spirit is sidelined. We talk about God, but that is sometimes confused. We say God when we mean God as in Old Testament "God the father", and we say God when we refer to the fullness of the Trinity the one God revealed in three persons. God is addressed often. Jesus though overshadows God. In some ways this makes sense because Jesus is the focus of the Christian faith. He is the model and the one who secures our redemption. But we talk about Jesus many times when we should be saying Holy Spirit. Is it Jesus everywhere or the Holy Spirit? Is it Jesus in us or the Spirit? Are we empowered by Jesus or the Holy Spirit? After all, Jesus seems to imply that when He is "gone" the Spirit is coming to sort of take over the reigns.

If they are all technically one, does it matter what label we use? If they are all equal and eternal why does our language in many ways put them in a ranking order?

All good questions. Let's take a look at a few scriptural pieces that might confuse and at the same time clarify. On Pentecost we talk about the Holy Spirit "coming". The sense is almost as if this is a "first appearance". Then the Holy Spirit if we are honest seems to be the prime mover and shaker through Acts and the New Testament outside the gospels. Jesus has ascended, the Holy Spirit arrived. Jesus is a focal point and example. The Spirit is the empowering, guiding force. But is this new?

We see that the Holy Spirit appears at Jesus' baptism. The Spirit affirms Jesus and God's claim on Him. This is well before Pentecost. Some might wonder if the Holy Spirit descending on Him is what opened up divine powers to work miracles and then He could impart that to His disciples, which it seems He did. If that wasn't Holy Spirit then what was it? As they had already done healings and cast out demons before Pentecost ever came around. Some suggest maybe this was an impermanent giving of the Holy Spirit that wasn't permanent until Pentecost. Whatever all that was, we know the Holy Spirit is distinctly upon Jesus at His baptism.

Then we have 1 Peter. This we need a double whammy on. The first and most basic is that Peter is revealing the Holy Spirit at work in the prophets of the Old Testament. He says that they didn't interpret anything but simply spoke the word of God because they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This pushes the Holy Spirit's action well before Jesus and I suggest tips the hand that the Spirit is part of the eternal God.

Their words are attributed to the Holy Spirit, though not any of the miracles of the prophets of old. Still, the power of God was clearly at work through them. Do we call that the Holy Spirit or the power of the God? More importantly if they are all one does it matter?

One issue is that this passage is used to say that the entire Bible was written by people who were almost possessed or puppeted by the Holy Spirit. They didn't control what they wrote but wrote directly from the Spirit. That's used to leverage questions and interpretations of scripture often conveniently.

But that's not what 1 Peter is saying. It says their WORDS were given directly by the Spirit. In other words what they SAID. This isn't talking about the WRITING of any parts of the Old Testament. Only the words spoken by the prophets as prophecy. If we trust that the words in the books of the prophets are reliable, then we can apply this to those passages. But that's not much or most of the Old Testament. There is poetry, story, histories, traditions, Mosaic Law, and more. And the New Testament hadn't been written yet...

This isn't discounting the authority of scripture mind you. Rather this is encouraging us to dive into it fully and headlong. Much of the richness of scripture comes from how it is written differently from different perspectives.

Just don't fall into the trap of making a claim about scripture that scripture itself doesn't claim.

Claiming things about the Holy Spirit that scripture doesn't claim has led to many misuses of this person in scripture. Perhaps the misuse on one hand is why others choose to not rely or appeal to that same Spirit as much as we should.

The book of Acts is filled with amazing tales of works done through the Holy Spirit. There are those that believe that if they aren't happening the same way now something is wrong. The result is that environments, productions, and traditions are contrived to make it seem like that's what's going on.

Speaking in tongues is an example. Some claim that you know you have the Holy Spirit if you speak in tongues. If you don't you should question if you have the Spirit, and by extension if you are truly redeemed. The problem is that scripture makes no claim. Paul says to ask for that gift, but there are other gifts more suited for building up ourselves and others than tongues. Yet for some this is an end all and be all sign. The bigger reality is that the Holy Spirit DOES gift all of us! This is the passages that remind us of "many gifts but one Spirit". It also reminds us that our gifts are to be used in service to building up the body of Christ, the church, and inviting others into the community of faith.

If we're lucky we can make a living doing what we're gifted to do and what we love. Some limit using their gifts to that avenue. As Christians it is our privilege to do more. Our act of gratitude to God is to use our talents in service to God and in service to one another. Scripturally that is their main purpose. Sometimes we get that backwards.

Many however focus on those "big splash" gifts that look like flashy miracles. You can easily find worship where the whole place is booming with people prattling on in tongues. Preachers will break into tongues mid-message or mid-sentence or mid-prayer. People will jump over seats and pews, flop around on the floor, shake and dance all over the sanctuary. There was a "holy laughter" movement where the church would roll on the floor laughing for minutes, and sometimes hours. There is the spectacle of a minister knocking someone or a crowd backwards and over as a spectacle. All of it called a "movement of the spirit".

It's impressive. For many it looks like a sign of power. For many it's something they want to possess themselves. Mix it with language about having supernatural power over demons and speaking blessings into existence and it's even more attractive.

The problem is that it just isn't scriptural. Paul is abundantly clear that anything done should be done in orderliness and without chaos. He says tongues should only be out loud if there is someone who can translate them, and even then only one at a time. He says that if people come in and see the chaos of everyone babbling in tongues they will think you are crazy.

These spectacles are just that. Spectacle that violates Paul's very own words about how worship and spiritual gifts are to be exercised. If you see it, walk the other way.

I don't put specific churches on blast, particularly with a visual, so I'll give you another from another passion of mine:

#### Clip of Kiai Master

This is an example of a misuse of something called Ki. Ki is described as an internal energy that everyone has. Even western medicine has some sense of this, though it's labelled differently than in eastern medicine. I've personally experienced ways folks have learned to use this energy in sometimes even dramatic ways. I also know how to spot a phony and this is it. This isn't how Ki works. So how does someone get enough students to have a large school, black belts, and pull something like this off?

First they start with a small crowd and convince them that Ki can accomplish this. They talk them into it and probably demonstrate a few legit skills along the way that adds a little truth to the mix. Train those students to react to your so called "energy" like this and now they think it's real. Do a demonstration and it looks impressive to many. "Knock someone out without ever touching them?! Sign me up!" Put them in class where everyone already believes it, call it Ki, and they'll typically fall into line. No one wants to feel like they are left out particularly with black belts around. And of course no one dares question the teacher.

And anyone who challenges the teacher will typically be shamed out.

Since very very few people ever get into an actual physical altercation, the techniques aren't ever tested and it's simple and easy to go on believing I possess some incredible power to win any fight.

This particular instructor got challenged by an actual fighter and foolishly accepted. Within literal seconds the teacher was beaten and proved a fraud.

Why do you think that these "holy spirit" pastors seem to be the ones most frequently caught up in scandals of fraud, misusing and abusing their authority, targeting and manipulating congregants, and so forth? Because when honest fire comes their way and genuine investigation things don't hold up.

The difference is that in the church it's harder to prove because you can't call someone on the mat and prove it out in 60 seconds.

But the same principle holds true. Create the illusion, call it Ki, or the Holy Spirit, and you can fool many people out there. In karate if it doesn't work you just tell the student they need to train harder. In church you tell them they have to double down on their belief and commitment to the church.

When you know something about Ki you can spot the fraud. This is why it's important to be familiar with the Holy Spirit and scripture in an honest sense. It helps us sense the real deal and spot a phony.

For anyone wondering, I'd like to offer a couple explanations for why we may not see the wild and wooly

miracles like in Acts and Jesus' ministry. One of the common scriptural arguments is that in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul talks about the "ceasing" of different gifts. For some this suggests that the gifts experienced in Paul's time had a shelf life.

For others it's more practical. In John's gospel miracles are called "signs". This is because they were evidence of Jesus identity. But they had a purpose. Draw attention to Jesus so people could listen to the more important thing, His message. Unfortunately most often people came for their miracle and walked away without hearing the message and if they did without letting it fully sink in.

The thought is that for those first apostles, their miracles, or signs, were evidence that they truly represented Jesus. It was to get attention so people would listen to them for a specific purpose. Build the church.

The point of the church isn't to be a dog and pony show of spectacle. It is to represent the authentic message of Jesus lived out in community and real time. THAT is to be the draw for people. And in early Acts it was. The people saw how the church lived and loved together and it was compelling for them to believe and transform. That transformation of heart, mind, and spirit is the most genuine miracle of all.

So with all of that, what does the Holy Spirit do?

Well, first and foremost I won't ever argue that the Spirit doesn't still heal and work wonders. I've heard enough legitimate stories to believe that the Spirit is still working. What I love is how many of those stories are quiet ones. The miracle didn't happen in a crowd, in front of cameras, or with a microphone. It was just something that happened and the recipient noticed. Or found out at a doctor's appointment. Something inexplicable happened with no other explanation.

Yes, the Spirit is still alive and working wonders. We just don't get to be the ones who command them. Often we have no idea why "this one" and not "that one". Why "this person" and not "that one". We just know that something outside of our understanding took care of something that no one else could sort out.

But we also see something wonderful in Romans 8. It's an odd passage but here's the gist. If you've ever known you need to pray but not what to pray for don't worry. The Holy Spirit is present and knows us deeper than sometimes we know ourselves. While we are grasping at what to form into our own prayers the Spirit is likely already praying for us. Some things are deep on a truly spiritual level and maybe it just takes that Holy Spirit inside of us to know it and put it into a language. I don't think it's an accident that "groans" is the term used. Because that's often all we can utter in those moments.

Corinthians tells us something else wonderful. It acknowledges the depth of knowing that Romans suggests. The Spirit is within us. The point of the passage is to respect our bodies because they house the Spirit. But that detail is incredible. The Holy Spirit dwells inside of each of us! That is how close God is to you and I. Spiritually we are tied to God at the deepest levels.

We keep in mind that the prophets of every age were often just simple people through whom God spoke. According to Peter that was the Holy Spirit. Guess what? You and I are simple people through whom God can speak. How will God speak? When? Who knows? But what a privilege to know that the Holy Spirit is within us and any time or every time could be using us as an instrument of hope and grace if we let It.

The Holy Spirit isn't some "power on command" for spectacles. If people who had that "healing power" actually had it as they claim why aren't they clearing out hospitals?

Yet the Spirit is still working. Maybe sometimes healing. More often It is helping people find comfort and strength through tragedy and trial. It is giving clarity and guidance to help us through confusion. It helps us find proper priority to find contentment no matter what is happening around us. It is a source of conviction to grow us more into the image of Jesus.

The Spirit is truly what Jesus said the Spirit would be, a Helper!

The Holy Spirit is at work in every one of us moving us, guiding us, and calling us into lives that show Christ to the world in love, kindness, forgiveness, humility and grace.

The Spirit works in big and small ways. The problem is that the world is flooded with the spectacle of everything. So that's what we look for. The truth is that the Holy Spirit most frequently works in those small, quiet moments. Moment to moment, each and every day the Spirit is as close as our own thoughts. And so often the things we call miracles are the result of the Holy Spirit edging us onward a little bit at a time.

The question is never if the Spirit is working, it's whether we're paying attention. Are we waiting for some big lightning bolt to happen from the outside of us in, or are we looking deep inside trying to connect with the Spirit that is already there?

Don't get me wrong, the Spirit comes about in many ways. There is a special experience of the Holy Spirit when we are together and gathered. We do well to embrace those times with heart, hope, and expectation.

Individually though, as we go from here today and through the week, that same Spirit abides with and within each of you. Each and every moment. Pay attention to what the Spirit is moving you to as the opportunities to

be the light of Christ cross your path. That incredible presence of God is available all the time as each of us goes through our personal and collective ups and downs. And that Spirit can do for us what it did for the early church. Transform us and give us the boldness to live out a faith that is compelling to the rest of the world around us.