

pastorhugh@svbc.ab.ca / General Adult

Where the Spirit of the Lord is / Genesis 1:1-2

Introduction

- Greetings.
- Today, we begin our new series, exploring the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- If you were with us last week, you will remember me saying that the idea is that we will trace noteworthy instances where He has shown up in the Scriptures, seeing what we can learn from these and discerning what He might have in store for us here at SVBC.
- We really don't have to look very far to make a start because the first instance where He shows up is in the second verse of the bible!

Genesis 1:1-2 *ESV*

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

- We all know what happened after this.
- For the next six days, God spoke the universe in all its complexity and all its magnificence into existence.

- Now, allow me to begin by saying that I am aware and reasonably conversant with the debates surrounding these two opening verses. Here is a summary of the problem:
- It is unclear whether verse 2 describes the state of the earth — without form, void, darkness over the face of the deep — before the creation account began or immediately after it began. That is, some are of the view that verse 2 describes pre-existent, primordial material that God worked with, bringing chaos to order, re-fashioning something that existed before, while others are of the view that it describes the raw materials that God brought into existence at the outset, right at verse 1, which He then proceeded to shape and form as He chose.
- We can get deeply into the weeds on this matter. I was down rabbit trails and thick into the weeds until Wednesday until I realised I had best get on with keeping the main thing the main thing.
- We can talk about conjunctive clauses and disjunctive clauses and the Initial Chaos View and the Gap Theory and the fall of Lucifer and Ancient Near Eastern Cosmogonies, but that would detract from our focus for this series and for this message, which is the person and work of the Spirit.
- And so, allow me to rather just state, up front, what my position is:
- The world as we know it is entirely the product of the Creator, God.
- He created the entirety of the universe *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.
- This is consistent with [John 1:3](#), which states,

John 1:3 ESV

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

- If this is true, then

- Verse 1 is an absolute, independent statement: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It is the first grand act of creation where God speaks the actual raw matter of the universe into existence.
 - Verse 2 then pauses to provide information about the state of the universe just after God has called it into existence but before He begins to fashion it.
 - From verse 3, God gets on with the business of fashioning.
-
- Allow me to use an analogy to illustrate what I mean.
 - One of the things I loved to do back in South Africa and hope to do again one day is build guitars.
 - Now, before you can build a guitar, you need to gather together all the bits and pieces that together constitute a guitar. You need
 - A nice book-matched set of Spruce or Cedar or some other type of soft, resonant wood that is suited for a soundboard.
 - Some other book-matched pieces of slightly harder woods like Walnut or Rosewood or Mahogany for the back and sides.
 - A nice piece of Mahogany or Maple or Spanish Cedar to fashion a neck.
 - Some pieces of extremely hard wood like Ebony or Wenge or African Blackwood for the fretboard.
 - Some pieces of bone for the nut and saddle.
 - All the necessary hardware - fret wire and tuners and a truss rod.
 - But before you can begin building, you also need an appropriate space — a workshop, with a workbench and a variety of machines and tools and jigs and consumables with which to get the job done.

- When I look at this text, I imagine God as a Cosmic Carpenter, approaching His workbench with all of His raw materials. The difference between human carpenters and God is that we need to head down to the local wood merchant to buy our raw materials, which we bring to our workspaces to begin crafting.
- God called His raw materials into existence. And what's more, as we will see, He does not need any tools for the job. His words are His tools.
- And so, when I read [Genesis 1:2](#), I picture God as poised over His newly created raw materials, ready to begin fashioning them into something beautiful.
- With that, let's turn our attention to the very first noteworthy first glimpse of the Spirit in the Scriptures.
- As we do so, I would like for us to consider what this passage teaches us about:
 - (1) The relational dynamic between Him and the other members of the trinity,
 - (2) The operational dynamic between Him and the other members of the trinity.
 - (3) His posture and what this implies.
- We will close with some thoughts about the implications of the passage for us.

Relational dynamic

- The Spirit is the only member of the Godhead who is explicitly named in the creation narrative.

- However, we know that this does not mean that creation was solely attributable to Him.
- The NT very clearly attributes the creation of the universe to the Son.

Colossians 1:15–16 ESV

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

- So, we know that the Spirit was involved. We know that the Son was involved. What about the Father?
- Well, if we look more closely at the creation account, and the original Hebrew word for God — the word *Elohim*—the grammar tells us something fascinating. The word itself is actually a plural noun. Right from page one, the Bible drops a subtle hint that our one God exists in a rich, multi-personal unity.
- And so, in terms of relational dynamic, the Spirit participates in perfect unison with the other members of the trinity. In the case of [Genesis 1](#), that unity is displayed through His intimate involvement in the creative act.
- But what role does He play?

Operational dynamic

- One of my interests, as you will come to see, is speech act theory and the application of the theory to biblical texts. The idea is that people do not just say things but do things with their words.
- Arguably, one of the strongest speech acts in all of history occurs right here in [Genesis 1](#), where God quite literally spoke the universe into existence. God said, and poof, stuff happened!

- [Genesis 1](#) presents us with a unique opportunity to use speech act as an analogy to illustrate the operational dynamic between the members of the trinity.
- When we understand the role of the Spirit in the creation account from a speech act perspective, the text really comes alive.
- You see, the word translated as Spirit in verse 2 is the word *Ruach*. Given its placement alongside *Elohim*, it is rightly translated as the Spirit of God. But this word *ruach* can also be translated as ‘wind, or breath.’
- Entertain me, if you will, by associating the Spirit of God with the concept of breath.
- Now, of course, the Spirit cannot be reduced to mere breath. He is far more than breath. He is omnipotent God. But the Spirit is described through the Scriptures in ways that allow us, as physical beings, to understand and relate to Him.
- So, for the purpose of the analogy, entertain the idea of associating the Spirit with the concept of breath.
- Now park that idea.
- Now, let's consider what the bible has to say about the Son in [John 1:1](#):

John 1:1 ESV

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- Christ is the *Logos*, the spoken Word.
- Have you ever read that and wondered, “What on earth does that even mean?” Well, our analogy might help to provide some insight!

- So, as you entertain the idea of the Spirit as breath, entertain also the idea of the Son as the Word.
- Now park that idea as well.
- Now, lets consider what the bible has to say about the role that the Father plays in divine communication, first in relation to Christ Himself:

-

John 12:49–50 ESV

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

- During His time on earth, Jesus spoke, but the words He uttered were those of the ultimate speaker, namely, the Father.
- Now lets consider what the bible has to say about the role that the Father plays in divine communication, this time in relation to the Spirit:

John 16:13–15 ESV

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

- What is clear is that there is an operational dynamic that exists between the members of the Godhead, especially as it pertains to the way in which God communicates.
 - Christ only communicates what He hears from the Father and

- The Spirit only communicates what He hears from both.
- And so, when we look at this creation narrative through the lens of speech act, it is not unreasonable to see the Father as the Speaker, the Son as the Spoken Word and the Spirit as the Breath that carried the speech along and made it effective.
- When we consider the role of the Spirit from this perspective, it becomes clear that the entire Godhead was involved in the speech-act of creation.
- The Spirit, however, played a particular role.
 - He was and is the manifest power of God that carries out the purposes of the Godhead.
 - He functions as the executive power through which the Father's creative Word becomes actualised.
- With each utterance of "Let there be," there was a demonstration of absolute unity of will and purpose in the trinity and the entire universe was energised and organised by the divine breath, the Spirit of God.

The hovering Spirit

- That said, I would like us to also consider more closely the posture of the Spirit in [Genesis 1:2](#).
- The bible says that the Spirit was 'hovering' over the face of the waters.
- I have always wondered what this means.
- What I learned this week is that the verb used for hovering in this account only appears in one other passage - in the song of Moses in [Deuteronomy 32:11](#).

- Here, God is pictured as hovering over His people...

Deuteronomy 32:11 ESV

¹¹ Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,

- The setting is that of Israel in the wilderness during the exodus. Here, the desert is another formless wasteland over which the Spirit hovers.
- When we apply this imagery to the creation account, we can imagine the Spirit brooding over the primordial earth as an eagle broods over its eggs, protecting something precious and fragile, anticipating its transformation from its original raw state into something magnificent.
- His posture is that of eager anticipation, as the divine superintendent, waiting to play His part in calling something raw and unformed to order.

Conclusion

- If the Spirit of God is the personal, powerful, and present member of the trinity who hovers expectantly, anticipating the bringing of the spoken word into reality, then I believe there are 2 implications for us.

First implication

- The first implication is that He is already waiting in eager anticipation to put into effect the next words that God has in store for SVBC. As Christians, I believe we struggle with a fallacy in that we think that we somehow need to get God's attention, to call Him down to where we are and engage with us.
- This is not the picture that the bible paints of the Spirit. He is ready and eager.

- But God will not speak unless we are positioned to hear from Him. We need to be diligently seeking after Him, pursuing Him, posturing ourselves in such a way that we are receptive and sensitive to His voice.
- For this reason, I believe that the first initiative that we must take is to engage in dedicated prayer.
- I know this is a praying church. I have seen it. I have experienced the fruits thereof. I am talking about intentional, dedicated prayer for the express purpose of hearing the next words that God intends to speak into this context for the coming season.
- Every Sunday, at 09:00, the Elders meet upstairs in Conference Room 202 for prayer ahead of the service. I would like to extend an open invitation to everyone who would like to participate to attend. You can pray out loud, you can pray in quiet, you can pray sitting down or standing up or on your knees.
- It really does not matter, as long as we are all together in a spirit of unity, seeking the same thing — that we would posture ourselves to meet the hovering Spirit and hear the words of God for the next season here at SVBC.

Second implication

- There is also a second implication: There are words that have already been spoken, words of instruction that have been written down, words that we have been invited to respond to and that the Spirit plays a perpetual part in bringing to effect, even as we obey what was said.

Matthew 28:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- When we respond to this instruction, we can have confidence that the Spirit waits with eager anticipation to participate.
- Even as we wait on God for a fresh word in season, we cannot be passive.
- Our church vision is to love God and serve others so that lives are changed. The best way to do that is by sharing the gospel with them. And here is the cool thing: it is not our responsibility to change people's lives. It is our responsibility to bring them to the One who can, the Spirit of God, Who hovers ready to act.