

Time of Grace Ministry
Trinity at Work: The Renewal
Titus 3:3-8
September 21, 2014

Does it creep you out to imagine that some kind of spirit lives within you?

Some of the most horrifying movies ever made involve possession, demon possession. You know, think of the Exorcist and all of the spin-offs that invited you to ponder the concept of what it would be like for some external spirit and evil spirit actually to take over your body and to influence or even control your behaviors. Isn't that just one of the most terrifying thoughts ever?

Well, you know what? God the Holy Spirit desires to live within you. Does that creep you out? Do you find that concept terrifying? It's actually thrilling. In fact, it's not only good, it's vital if you are to be saved for without the faith that the Spirit creates inside you – something you cannot synthesize by yourself – you cannot be saved. What I'd like to talk to you about today is to celebrate the work of the third person of the trinity. Celebrate the way he indwells you; lives within your life.

In our Bible study for today, the final message in the series called "Trinity at Work," I'd like to ponder with you what the Spirit of the Lord does to transform and change our lives. In fact, the Spirit is the lone power source that keeps you out of hell for everything that Jesus did, which he bought for the world, if it is not connected to people by faith, the Spirit of the Lord is not living in that person. Everything Jesus bought is in vain and there will be people in hell needlessly suffering because what was bought for them they either never heard about or having heard about it did not believe it.

I'd like to invite you to take out your Bible and open it up to the book of Titus; a short little book. You may have to struggle a little bit to find it. It's in your New Testament near the end of the Epistles of St. Paul. In fact, in my Bible it's so short it's only two pages plus a little bit onto a third.

At any rate, Titus was a valued younger partner of Paul and would have lived on after Paul was executed in the 60s A.D. He would have continued the beat along with his younger generation of leaders. And Paul wrote him a powerful little letter. Do not underestimate the value of this book. It's only two pages but there's not a wasted word. It has huge impact. And he writes about the qualifications for leadership. Then, as now, leadership in the church – they struggled with it. There were some charlatans and fakers and inadequate leaders at that time as there are today. And God laid out his expectations of the type of men that he wanted to put forward to lead his church.

But there's also some powerful writing about the transformation that takes place on how you go from unsaved to saved; from being an unbeliever to a believer; candidate of hell to candidate for heaven. And in Titus 3 I'd like to read a paragraph with you today. So please open up your Bible to Titus 3.

Have you found the spot? Let's take a look at it. Titus 3:3 tells you something about yourself that you suspect but are not eager to admit. It tells who you are and what you're like before the Spirit of the Lord came to live within you: "At one time we too," even we, Christians, non-Christians alike, everybody is born this way. And here are four adjectives and participles as descriptors of what you are like by nature and you're not going to want to hear this because you're proud, you're trying so desperately to feel good about yourself and be proud of yourself and this is so humbling to admit "This is me." And the reason you know this is true is even after you become a Christian and all your sins are washed away from your record but they are not yet extinguished from your life. You are a work in progress as the transformation goes on. But until you are in heaven you are still going to be living out some of the poisons and bad attitudes that you were born with and so these vestiges still exist in your mind and heart and you still feel the impulse to think and act like this. So be a man, be a woman, right now, grow up and even you kids, grow up and take this as adults – take these hard words without arguing with God. He's not saying this to beat you down; he's saying this to explain your need. It's a diagnosis. When you get some bad news from your doctor don't shoot the messenger. You want the truth from your doctor. This is the truth. "Can you" – Jack Nicholson fans – "handle this truth?"

"We too," now here's four hard words, "foolish." You're fools by nature! Fools are in love with fool's gold. They love trash and they disrespect their treasures. Fools' value system is upside down from God's. Fools believe lies. You're by nature a fool and I am, too. We chase the wrong things. We chase and eat poison and the good food we steer away from. That's the work and thinking process of fools.

"We are disobedient." We don't like authority structure; push back on anybody who dares to tell us what to do. Well, you know that! You still feel that urge. Though forgiven of your sins you still feel the urge to sin and that impulse of disobedience is in your heart. Now admit it, when you know that God wants something there's instantly a desire to push back against it.

Did I ever tell you the time I went to one of the hospitals around here and they have a big circular door? Just to show how this automatically seems to come out – there's the, you know, cylindrical rotating door and you're supposed to use that one and not the swinging doors; you're supposed to go through the big one. And it says, "No strollers." What do you think is the first thought to go through my head? "I could get a stroller through here easy." The first thought to pop into my head. The minute I heard a rule I want to disobey it immediately because I don't like people telling me what to do and every rule means that something exciting is being denied to me and I want to live life to the fullest, I want to live large, I want to live dangerously. I want to live like a rebel. I don't want to have my life described as some meek guy who rolls over for absolutely everything that comes along.

We don't even particularly want to know what God wants. I wonder how many of you could write out for me the Ten Commandments as God said them in his word in order. I'm not going to embarrass you by asking you to tell me the truth if you think you could but I bet half of you couldn't. And I wonder how many of you could even find them in your Bible right now. If you had fifteen seconds to find the Ten Commandments in the Bible would you even know where to look? We don't even want to know what the rules are because then we might have to obey them.

One of my favorite musical groups is a rock band whose name I will not mention; I don't want to run them down necessarily. But one of the songs that has a very catchy tune and a great beat basically says, "I'm my own moral compass." That's as far as our culture cares to go. We'll make up our own rules. I'll figure out what's good and bad, right and wrong, moral, immoral because I think I would rather live in my world than for me to surrender my will to allow someone else to tell me what to do. And you know that feeling because you like it. That's why you know this is the truth. This is the way we're born; to be disobedient and to push back on every authority structure, including against God.

Number three is "Deceived." Deceive people – the Greek word here in its original Greek, *planomenoi*, means to wander around like a drunken idiot. We are lost and confused in our world. We don't know right and wrong and we think, "I'll make up my own," but there are absolute rules in this universe and God is an absolute ruler. And if you think, "I don't have to listen to you," you are in major trouble!

Number four: "Enslaved." In the chase for freedom, in trying to get what we want and throwing off restraint so that nobody can tell me no, we think we're becoming free but ironically Satan is laughing and clamping one chain after another on us. This is big stuff for the human race. Take this without arguing with God. Let him explain to you how things work.

And now come three more activities as examples. "We lived in malice, envy, being hated and hating one another." Malice, envy and hatred – this is the natural human condition. Malice is kind of a big word that means you enjoy inflicting pain on somebody else. Every child who's ever been on a playground in her life or his life knows about malice. Bullies, bully boys pushing and hurting other kids – why? Because they can. Catty, snippy, cliquey girls mocking someone who's not as pretty, not as thin, whose clothes are not as good and enjoying the pain of excluding somebody else. That's malice and you know that urge because you've given into it yourself.

Envy means you don't clap and cheer for somebody else's triumphs. You resent it because you feel cheated. In your endless lust for more, any time somebody else has more than you, you think, "I've been cheated. I hate her; she's so pretty." Instead of saying, "How wonderful of God to give her a pretty face or a pretty form." Envy means I hate my so-called life. And you stew and you resent – it seems like everybody's got it going on but me. You know about that, don't you, because it's in your heart, too. It still is.

"Being hated and hating one another," even in the Christian world, even though our sins have all been forgiven in Christ, we still are acting out these ancient sicknesses, aren't we, that are within us. The divorce rate for Christians is not appreciably much better than the divorce rate for the population as a whole. You can hardly even tell by looking at the divorce rate, where broken relationships happen in our world, as well. And anger and hatred lurk and live here. Satan is trying to manipulate what he has to work with. This is our need and I say this to you not to beat you down but just so that you and I, guided by Paul, honestly admit that this is why we need help.

Now comes the good news: "But," the most wonderful word; turning things around. "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared," in the context it is evident that this is

referring to God the Father, that's what made the change. You didn't change the game, you didn't break out of it, you didn't clean yourself up for God. He knew you couldn't so he came down and his, "Kindness and love appeared." The wonderful Greek word is "epiphany." He had an epiphany; it was revealed.

"He saved us." We didn't save ourselves. He saved us. "Not because of righteous things we had done." And that is such a relief. First, it's impossible. Second, it stops the endless self-justification that's a bottomless pit. You never know if you cleaned yourself up enough. All you do is get into mind games and arguments and comparing yourself with people worse than you so thinking they're worse than you. Or trying to blame someone else for putting you in this situation. Blame your parents; it always works. You can get away with that one forever. Blame your parents, blame your friends, blame your kids, blame somebody. Blame your spouse. Blame your ex-spouse; that will work; that will work forever. You can stay angry at your ex-spouse, if you're divorced, forever, can't you? That person can never be rehabilitated. The person will be a jerk in your mind that you can attribute all the dysfunctions in your life to forever. Play whatever game you want; we cannot clean up ourselves enough for God but we don't have to. The God of mercy knows we can't. He saved us. How?

Let's take a look: "Through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." Through these acts of washing and of rebirth and renewal by the Spirit, "We're justified by his grace," Jesus' grace. "Justified" means that in court you hear the sweetest words any accused defendant ever hears in court. Two wonderful words and what are they? "Not guilty." Say it with me and enjoy it: "Not guilty."

Point to the person who's not guilty. We are not guilty! That's what justified means. Somehow you beat the rap because your lawyer paid all your fines, did all your jail time for you. In fact, even suffered capital punishment on your behalf and tells you now in advance before your trial ever happens: "You are not guilty now already." That's what justified means. It's kind of a fancy church word but honestly, I hope you cling to it. Some Christian writers have called it the most important teaching in all of Christendom. It is the article of faith on which the church stands or falls; that we are justified through the amazing mercy and grace of Christ and his blood washes us clean. That's how we start over.

And now it is connected to you personally through the working of the Spirit and see, here's why this is such a big deal: There will be many people in hell whose sins have been forgiven but they didn't know about it. Or if they knew about it, they didn't believe it. And so his mercy, universally purchased for all, does not come to touch their lives at their moment of need. For the Bible says that we are saved by God's grace but, "through faith." And don't try to split those apart. They may seem opposite concepts. Grace is for everybody. Faith is only believed by some. You can't split them apart; they belong together like this. And the Spirit's work is to connect you in faith. He alone can build the faith in your heart that you need and he does it with his wonderful word. Either that comes to you in the form of written or spoken communication or the word can come to you through the vehicle of water, as well. Here it's called a washing. Your baptism is a "washing of rebirth and renewal."

Because it brings God's powerful transformational word – when your baptism happens, you literally are born all over again. The ultimate mulligan. You go all the way back to the beginning for a do-over and you become a new person with a heart – the Bible calls it – a “heart of flesh” instead of a heart of stone.

This is a big deal and I hope you never get tired of thanking the Spirit for what he accomplished inside of you. Something no drug could ever do for you and it's a transformation that does not have nasty negative side effects. You may simply welcome it and enjoy it. You are born again. You have been transformed. The Bible sometimes calls it a “turning,” a “conversion.” Same word. Or “regeneration.” Same concept; just different words to describe the change that only God can bring about in a person's heart.

1 Corinthians 12 says, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit.” That's his gift to you to chase after you, tackle you, get inside you while you're still alive, before you're dead and it's too late, and then wrestle with you, change you, and then first he catches you, then he clings to you. He's like the ultimate fisherman, you might say. Then comes the renewal process and that's a work in progress. But the work in progress that you are and the things I see in your life – the grace and mercy words I hear coming out of your mouth, the acts of kindness to undo your acts of malice and meanness – these are fruits of the Spirit and we celebrate that, as well. The Spirit is our energy source to continue to live and undo the damage that we've done because of our many sins. And we'll never get tired of thanking him for that.

“It's a renewal through the Holy Spirit whom God poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, justified by grace we now have become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” And I want to celebrate with you Bible hope, which is not the same as earthly hope. You are perhaps aware – if I say, “I hope our baseball team wins this afternoon,” – you will say, “Well, good luck with that.” We have perhaps a .4 chance of that happening. They have been losing more than winning this year and if I say I hope and you'd say, “Well, I hope so, too! I hope it doesn't rain on us. I hope it doesn't rain on our family picnic.” Those are just pious wishes signifying nothing at all. If I say, “Oh man, Grandma's been so ill but I hope she can make it to her granddaughter's wedding next summer,” maybe she will, maybe she won't. Hope is just a wish. It means, “I wish that could happen.”

When the Bible says “hope,” it doesn't mean a pious wish. It means a certainty that's already in the bag. You've already gotten your bank statement and the check has cleared. Your sins are paid for. Your reservation in heaven is good. The confirmation number is right there in the Bible. You can take a snapshot; there's some little photos of what your room is going to be like and what your new life is going to be like in heaven.

This isn't just a wish-hope; this is certainty-hope. It's exciting-hope! It's joyful anticipation that God has made you an heir. You've been adopted into his family. And so the life that we're living right now is fueled up. It makes us optimists because knowing we're justified and forgiven it takes all of the fear away. We can live without fear.

We have power to tap into. We're not struggling on our own; trying to fix and lift up ourselves. With the Spirit's help, we may call on him every day to continue to renew us. When we've been

forgiven we can cut each other some slack. When God is patient with us, we can be patient with each other. See how this goes ? We fuel up on what he's given us and that new optimism we have, that joy, that juice, that we get from God, we can spread around and start replacing those old behaviors of malice and confusion and hatred and enjoying other people's pain and replace it with a servant attitude and find joy contradicting everything Satan's trying to lie to you about. Find joy in serving other people and in helping and lifting other people up.

This is great news for God's people because it means we've got a meaningful and joyful life and we have the absolute certainty of a happy eternity with him in heaven. This is good news for God's people. Let everybody say, "Amen."

Here's a letter from a prison inmate. What this man had to write, I think you might find interesting. He says, *"I thank God for you."* I think he was talking to me; writing to Time of Grace. *"And I thank you for allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you. We are given free will and because you exercise your free will to do God's work, you are a blessing to all."* Thank you, that's pretty cool. *"I receive a printed copy of your messages and share them with fellow inmates. Thank you for your time to listen to a child of God who no longer lives in darkness but lives for Christ."*

I think this is a good example of how an indwelling of a spirit is not something terrifying or harmful but here is someone in whom the Holy Spirit has begun to live and work. And though he was motivated by other spirits, evil spirits who prompted him and prompted the evil already within his own heart to act in some ways that were illegal and hurtful to other people, he has found the joy and relief that comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in his insides. It's helped him to find forgiveness of his sins through his Savior, helped him to get control of his behaviors, and helped him to believe that there was going to be better days coming. That there was hope in his heart, hope in his future; that's all a fruit of the Holy Spirit working within him.

It gives me great encouragement to know that through Time of Grace bringing the word to people, even prison walls cannot keep out the word and even his own sinful walls were not powerful enough to keep out the working of the Holy Spirit within him.

I'd like to pray with you today. As my little series on the trinity has concluded, let's let our thoughts dwell on the enormous benefits we received from the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Holy Spirit, we come to you today in gratitude. Thank you for finding a way to convert us; to bring us from darkness to light; from unbelief to faith. The only reason we are believers now is because you have successfully planted faith in our hearts. We pray that you will sustain it. Speak your words to us, build us up, assure us of our forgiveness, encourage us to use the gifts you've placed there, and help us to be useful for your agenda. We praise you Holy Spirit and appreciate all you do in the name of Jesus. Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske. Every day is a day of God's amazing grace for you.

Grace notes

guides for personal Bible study

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Titus 3:3-8: “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

Points to Ponder

1. Because of sin, we are often foolish and fall in love with what Pastor Jeske refers to as “fool’s gold,” things that are contrary to God’s plans for us. What are some things in your life that might qualify as fool’s gold? Make a list of five things.
2. **Read Titus 3:3.** In what ways does Paul describe the way we were before God sent his Son?
3. How has the Holy Spirit made a difference in your spiritual life?
4. If you do good works on earth, will they help you get to heaven? What is at the heart of true good works?
5. **Read Titus 3:8.** As we press on in life, entrusted by God with the wonderful message of our Savior, how can we encourage others to let the Holy Spirit live in their hearts?

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. But our loving Father sent his Son to save us, and we no longer have to struggle on our own. The Holy Spirit changes us, renews us, and helps us to overcome our temptations and to live lives of thankfulness and service to God and others.

What else does God say?

Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!