

"The Witness of Our spirits" 2 Corinthians 1:12, Matthew 16:13-20 (06/29/25)

Last week, we talked about how we can have assurance that the Holy Spirit is present with us. As I explained last week, Wesley was concerned that Methodists would lose three characteristics before his death: Doctrine, Spirit, and Discipline. Here, the Spirit that Wesley is talking about is not only the Holy Spirit, but also the response of our spirit. In other words, the Spirit that Wesley is talking about is the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and our human spirits. If this characteristic of being connected to God by the Spirit and spirits were to disappear from Methodists, Methodists would become a church with only shape and no power.

If you read the story of God creating Adam in Genesis, you will see that God created Adam differently from other creatures. One is that God created Adam in the image of God, and the other is that God breathed God's breath into the human when God created the human. Here, this breath is called Ruah in Hebrew, which was later translated into Greek as pneuma, which is a name for the Holy Spirit. In other words, when God created the human, God breathed the Spirit into the human and created the human. That is why, unlike other creatures, we can connect with God through spirit and communicate through spirit.

Therefore, the evidence that God is with us, the evidence that God's Spirit is with us, is not only evidence from God's Spirit, but also evidence that appears through our spirit. Before we respond to God with our spirits, God first awakens us with the light of the Holy Spirit, with God's infinite grace. However, we can see that our relationship with God is complete only when we respond to that grace

with our spirits.

Let's think about the love relationship between a man and a woman that we often think about. Let's think about a man who has a one-sided love for a woman. Can we say that this is a perfect love relationship? If this man forces his love on this woman a little too much or persistently wants her love, this relationship is not a beautiful and happy love relationship, but a relationship where one side is full of desire, the other side is unhappy, and in severe cases, it can even become a stalking relationship. When both sides sincerely love each other, that relationship can be described as a beautiful love relationship.

God loves us unconditionally. God loves us so much that God gave the only Son for us. But is this love of God stalking? Is this love of God one-sided? Only when we respond to God with love with all our hearts can this love relationship become a perfect love relationship. This is why responding to God with our spirit is a very important part for Christians to fully understand God's love. So what does it mean for us to respond to God with our spirit? How can we respond to God with our spirit?

First, let us all confess together again, following last week's confession. "Jesus is Christ, Jesus is my Savior, Jesus is the only Son of the Living God." As I said last week, this confession is a confession of faith that we can make because the Holy Spirit is present in us. At the same time, this confession is a confession that we can make because we can respond with our spirits. Even if God opens our eyes and ears by God's grace and we know that Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of the living God, if we do not confess it through our will, we cannot make this

confession.

Today's Gospel reading is a story that everyone knows well, and it is one of the most important scenes in the Bible. It is the scene where Peter confesses Jesus as Christ. Matthew wrote the Gospel to let the Jewish people know who Jesus is, so he used the word Messiah in this story. This word, Messiah, was translated in the Greek word as Χριστός during the Roman Empire. Therefore, Peter confessed Jesus as Christ in the area of Caesarea Philippi. Before that, many people had seen Jesus' power and heard Jesus' teachings. However, most people knew Jesus as a rabbi, a teacher, or a prophet sent by God after a 400-year period. However, here, Peter clearly confessed Jesus as Christ.

Before we understand Peter's confession, we need to know where Caesarea Philippi was. Today's Gospel Scripture clearly indicates that the place where Peter confessed Jesus as Christ was Caesarea Philippi. Although we do not currently know which specific location in Caesarea Philippi it was, we can learn about this area through the ancient temples and historical materials remaining in the area. The ancient temples in Caesarea Philippi were places where the Roman gods were worshipped. Caesarea Philippi was famous for serving many gods during the time of Jesus. At that time, the Roman Empire's religion was polytheistic, worshipping many Roman gods and goddesses. Peter was also born and raised in the Roman Empire, so he was more familiar with polytheistic beliefs. In this area, where people grew up in a polytheistic culture and had many temples, Peter confessed Jesus as Christ beyond his own culture, faith, experience, and knowledge. Jesus had already revealed to Peter many times that he was Christ.

Confessing Jesus as Christ was Peter's choice and decision. Like Peter, when we confess Jesus as Christ beyond our culture, faith, experience, and knowledge, we can have the assurance that God is with us.

Second, we can have the assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence through living a life that bears the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians, we can see the nine fruits of the Spirit. In Galatians 5, Paul explained the nine fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It means that a person who is with the Spirit lives by seeing the results of these nine fruits.

But let me ask one question. Is it easy to live a life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Can anyone say for sure that "I am living a life that bears these nine fruits"? When I decided to live by the Word of God, these nine fruits of the Holy Spirit became my life goal, but at the same time, it became my despair. Some days, I felt like I was full of love and finally bore the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and I was filled with joy. On other days, I found myself unable to love my enemies and felt disappointed in myself, thinking that I had yet to bear fruit. The doctor told me not to eat foods or snacks that contain a lot of sugar for my health. One day, I thought I was self-controlled, and another day, I saw myself eating chocolate and cookies. Rather than giving me the assurance that the Holy Spirit is with me, these nine fruits in the Bible made me someone who does not yet know the Holy Spirit.

So, how can we have the assurance of God's presence through the life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit? According to Wesley, the important thing is

this: “Do we pursue the life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit?” “Do we want to live the life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit?” Even the feelings of frustration and despair that came from my failure to bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit can be a witness of the Holy Spirit’s presence. If I do not know God, if I am a person who has no relationship with the Holy Spirit, I will not be angry or despair because I cannot love God and my neighbors, I will not be disappointed by myself because I cannot be happy, peaceful, and patient, and because I cannot self-control myself. It is not important how perfectly I bear the fruits, but it is important to know whether I pursue a life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and whether I have decided to live a life that bears the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Through our desire, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is with us.

Let me give you an example through my story. This happened when I was a seminarian in South Korea. I was on the way to my church to attend Wednesday evening service by subway. When I arrived at the subway station near my church, a homeless person was sitting right in front of the entrance of the station. It was very cold that day, and she was shivering from the cold, wrapped only in a thin blanket. At the time, I had about \$30 in my wallet, which my mother had put in there, and my mother told me to use this money for myself. She told me this because I used money for others too much at that time. I felt sorry for the homeless person, but since it was money my mother gave me to use, I just ignored her and passed her. I kept walking toward the church for a while, and I felt uncomfortable about not helping her. And as I walked, I kept thinking, ‘With the money in my pocket, that homeless person could eat a warm meal.’ So I eventually stopped and went back to the homeless person, gave her the money, and told her to have a

warm meal.

Do you think my story was an action that bore the fruit of the Holy Spirit? I don't think so because I complained to God all the way back to that person. 'God, why do you give me such an uncomfortable feeling that I cannot just pass by that person? Or put so much money in my wallet that I can give it to her without hesitation right there.' And I even went to that homeless person and did not give her the whole \$30. I just gave her about \$20. In the Bible, there is a story about the Good Samaritan, who healed the wounds of the injured person, took him to a nearby inn, paid the expenses, and offered to pay for the extra expenses. Compared to this story of the Good Samaritan, I helped the homeless woman, but I did not do it with joy, and I did not give her everything I had. However, one thing I am certain of is that, although my actions did not bear fruit, the uncomfortable feeling that led me to the homeless woman at that time was from the Holy Spirit. If I had ignored that uncomfortable feeling and let it pass, I would not have had the assurance that the Holy Spirit gave me. However, because I pursued a life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit, I could obey the voice of God in my heart even though I did not do so joyfully. I had the uncomfortable feeling because I was trying to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in my life, so I could have the assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence through my uncomfortable feeling.

If we desire to live by God's Word, if we desire to love God and our neighbors, if we feel compassion when we see someone who needs help, and if we feel the need to attend church to worship God on Sunday, then the Holy Spirit

is definitely with us. However, the choice and obedience are ours, and if we obey the heart that God gives us, we will see clear evidence through our spirits that God is with us.

The Holy Spirit is with us! When God created us, God breathed God's Spirit into us. We are God's creation who can have a spiritual relationship with God. Before we know God, God revealed God's grace to us to let us know who God is, who Jesus is, and who the Holy Spirit is. We had the opportunity to confess Jesus as our Christ because of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Because God loves us so much, God waits for us to confess our love toward God with our free will. God's love is not a one-sided love. God showed God's patience until we confess our love. The Holy Spirit guides us to know who Jesus is, and we should confess Jesus as our Christ. From this confession, we start the journey of life that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit. And in this journey, the Holy Spirit guides us step by step to bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Now we are not in despair or disappointment. Now we are assured of God's presence. I hope that we can begin the journey of life with the Holy Spirit. If there is anyone who has experienced despair in that journey, I hope that they can hold the hand of the Holy Spirit who leads them to the end and rise again. If there is anyone who is already experiencing the grace of the Holy Spirit in that journey, I hope that their faith and joy can be strengthened. May the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who leads our lives to Jesus Christ, be abundant in us today. Amen.