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Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #44  
June 21, 2020

## Sermon Summary #44

### The Impartation of Peace and Power John 20:19-23

I have a confession to make. There have been times in my Christian life when I've felt intimidated by the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). When I think about the command of Jesus that we are to "go", I worry that I might not have the required courage to obey. When I hear him tell us to "make disciples of all nations" and to "baptize" them, I feel profoundly inadequate. And when he exhorts us to "teach" others to observe or obey everything he has commanded, I realize that such applies equally to me. I am responsible not simply to "teach" others to obey but also to do so myself.

That's when I start to feel helpless. How in the world am I going to find the strength to "to observe all that" Jesus "commanded"? And that's when I remember something else Jesus said. It was addressed to the first group of disciples, but it applies equally to you and me:

"And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Jesus said it yet again in Acts 1:8,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

There can be mistake about what Jesus intended in saying this. He's telling them then and us today that he is not going to leave us powerless. He is not going to ask us to do anything for which he doesn't supply the necessary strength to obey. Whew! That is incredibly encouraging news. And it is with reference to this promise of the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks in the passage before us today. So, if you're asking yourself, "How can I obey all that Jesus has commanded? How can I imitate him in life and in ministry?" the answer is found in the gift of the indwelling and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

#### *Addressing a Theological Dispute*

This raises a question that is unavoidably controversial. In recent days, it has been the focus of considerable debate among evangelicals. Some have gone so far as to charge people with heresy who defend the view that I will defend.

There are three views on how Jesus was able to live the life he did, how he was able to teach with such authority, how he stood firmly against opposition from the religious leaders of his day, how he healed the sick, how he drove out demons, how he walked in such intimate communion and fellowship with the Father. So, how did he do it?

(1) One view is that he did it by virtue of or by drawing on the strength and power of his divine nature as God. After all, Jesus is God incarnate, God in human flesh. We saw this in our first few studies in John's gospel: Jesus is the Word who became flesh. The Word was in the beginning with God, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The "Word", of course, is a reference to the second person of the Trinity, the Son. And the Son became a human in the person of Jesus. This, as I've said on countless occasions, may well be the single greatest and most mind-blowing supernatural event ever. God became a man!

But the conclusion that most evangelicals draw from this is that when Jesus healed those afflicted with leprosy, he did it by virtue of his divine nature as the Son of God. When he healed the paralytics or drove out demons or opened blind eyes he did it because he was God, and as God he has the attribute of omnipotence: he has power without limit. When

he resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness, he did it by drawing strength from his divine nature as God. When he displayed supernatural knowledge of what other people were thinking, he did it because as God he is omniscient: he knows all things. Now, make no mistake. Jesus of Nazareth was God, is God, and always will be God. Nothing that I will now say changes that. But I don't believe it was by virtue of the strength and attributes of his divine nature that he lived and ministered as he did.

(2) The second approach to this question is, in fact, quite heretical. Some have misinterpreted what the apostle Paul says in Philippians 2. You may recall that the apostle there says that "although he was in the form of God, [God the Son] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6-7).

Those who embrace this second view argue that what God the Son "emptied" himself of was his divine nature. He gave up or sacrificed or renounced the very presence of those attributes that make God to be God. To put it bluntly, **God the Son committed divine suicide. He altogether and quite literally ceased to be God.** In order to be fully human, in order to live a genuinely human existence and to be able to relate to us as humans, the Second Person of the Trinity in some bizarre sense ceased to be God. He willed to divest himself of every divine attribute, or at least those attributes that would have been inconsistent with living as a genuine human being.

This is the theory of **Kenosis**. It is called Kenosis because the Greek verb translated "he emptied" himself is *kenoō*. This view has rightly been deemed heretical. It is outside the boundaries of what is acceptable Christian doctrine. So where does that leave us? It leaves us with what I believe is the only biblically faithful view.

(3) According to this third view, God the Son didn't cease to be God when he became human. When the Word became flesh, he didn't cease to be the Word. He simply added a human nature to his divine nature. He is now both God and man, the God-man. But he didn't avail himself of his divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience in order to live and minister as he did. When Paul says that he "emptied" himself he immediately tells us in what sense this is true. Look again at Philippians 2 and let me render it as literally as I can:

"[He] emptied himself BY taking the form of a servant and BY being born in the likeness of men."

In other words, **he emptied himself not by subtraction but by addition.** He didn't lose anything. Rather he gained a human nature. And in doing so he voluntarily suspended the exercise of certain divine attributes and powers so that he might live a genuine human life and experience the world around him just like we experience ours.

So, if he didn't cease to be God, and yet didn't make use of his divine attributes to live and minister, how did he heal the sick and drive out demons and preach with such authority and hear the Father's voice with such clarity? He did it through the power of the Holy Spirit who anointed him, indwelt him, and empowered him. We see this in many passages in the NT.

Before we look at them, let me state my understanding once again: ***It was not primarily by virtue of his divine nature that Jesus lived the kind of life he did and ministered in power to the sick and demonized, but rather through his constant and ever-increasing reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit.***

We first saw this in John 3:34-35. "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand." God the Father is "he" who gives the Spirit without measure to Jesus, the one "whom God has sent," the one who "speaks the words of God." If Jesus spoke the words of God because he was God, if he served and ministered solely by virtue of his own native or inherent deity, why would he be given the presence of the Holy Spirit (least of all "without measure")? What would be the need?

Thus, my thesis is that it was as a man, a human being, who depended moment-by-moment on the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus lived and ministered as we read in the gospels. This doesn't mean he wasn't also simultaneously God.

The Son chose to experience the world through the limitations imposed by human consciousness and an authentic human nature. The attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience were not lost or laid aside, but became *latent* and *potential* within the confines of his human nature. They are fully present in Jesus, but no longer in exercise. The incarnation thus means that Jesus “actually thought and acted, viewed the world, and experienced time and space events strictly within the confines of a normally developing human person” (Hawthorne, 210). In his constant dependence on the Holy Spirit, drawing daily upon the Spirit’s presence and power, Jesus demonstrated how God intends for us to live and minister.

***Jesus is our model for how God wants us to live in humble, reliant trust on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can reasonably expect to “be like” Jesus, to “live like” Jesus, and to “obey” Jesus only to the degree that we draw from the same divine power on which he faithfully relied: the Holy Spirit.***

#### *The Holy Spirit in Jesus*

Consider the **baptism** of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. According to John 1:32, the Spirit not only came down upon Jesus at his baptism, the Spirit “remained” or “abided” on him, an indication of his continuing, ongoing, abiding presence. Unlike those of the OT on whom the Spirit came but for a time (1 Sam. 16:14; 2 Kg. 3:15) to equip them for a task, only then to depart, in the case of Jesus, the Spirit remained permanently, perpetually equipping and enabling him for ministry.

Mark 1:10, the Holy Spirit did not simply come “upon” Jesus but came “into” (*eis*, not *epi*) him. Perhaps this is Mark’s way of indicating that the Holy Spirit *entered into* Jesus, an indication that ***the relationship is not one of mere external enablement but internal intimacy and empowering.*** Jesus was now the permanent bearer of the Spirit.

Finally, we know that this descent of the Spirit upon/into Jesus at his baptism constituted his “anointing” or empowering for public ministry (see Luke 4:18-21, fulfilling Isaiah 61:1-2). Peter says the same thing in his sermon to Cornelius: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). To be anointed with the Holy Spirit is to receive that power which accounts for the “good” works of Jesus’ ministry, his healings and his delivering of those oppressed of Satan. Thus, what he did, he did primarily because “God was with him” in, through and by means of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

We should also take special note of the **temptation** of Jesus by Satan. It was not by accident or even his own initiative that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark (1:12) says the Holy Spirit “drove” or “thrust forth” Jesus into the wilderness. Whatever other plans Jesus might have had, the Holy Spirit overruled or in some way pointed out and directed him to his encounter with the enemy. We don’t know by what means the Spirit communicated this to Jesus, but it may well have been by an audible voice, or perhaps an inward impression, or even a vision. Matthew (4:1) and Luke (4:1) both use a milder term (*agein*; to lead or guide), reinforcing the point that Jesus willingly submitted to the Spirit’s guidance.

Jesus was not only led *into* the wilderness by the Spirit (Matt. 4:1) but was also being led by the Spirit *in* the wilderness during the entire course of the forty days (Luke 4:1; it was, no doubt, the Spirit who led Jesus to fast). The point is that ***Jesus met and resisted Satan’s temptations not by his own power alone but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was fortified and energized by the continual infusion of divine power from the Spirit of God.***

The coming of the Spirit into Jesus led Luke to describe him as being ***“full of the Holy Spirit”*** (4:1). The stunning thing is that these are the same terms used to describe the experience of Christians after Pentecost! Stephen was selected for the diaconate precisely because he was, among other things, “full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5).

Following his victory over Satan, “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee . . . . And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” (Luke 4:14-15). In what “power” and by virtue of what resource did Jesus begin to teach, preach and perform miracles? It was not through his own initiative or by virtue of his own inherent skills alone or even because he was God incarnate. Rather, Luke identifies Jesus’ power as the power of the Holy Spirit. Those things Jesus did, which led to his fame throughout the land, were due to the “the power of the Spirit.”

We then read in Luke 4:16-21 (cf. Isa. 61:1-3; 11:1-5) that Jesus himself was conscious of the fact that he had been anointed with the Holy Spirit and in this way was empowered to “proclaim good news to the poor” and “to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind” and “to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Again, if Jesus did all this in the power of his own divine nature, why was the anointing of the Holy Spirit necessary at all?

Could it be that Jesus’ exhortation that we pray for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) flowed from his own experience of the Spirit? Could it be that he himself prayed for continued, repeated anointings or fresh waves of the Spirit’s presence and power to sustain him for ministry, and here encouraged his followers to do the same? Yes, I think so.

What about the *miracles* of Jesus? In Matthew 12:22-32 Jesus delivers a demonized man and heals him of his blindness and his inability to speak. The Pharisees accused him of doing this through the power of Satan himself. Our Lord’s response to this scurrilous charge is that it is absurd to think that Satan would fight against his own demons and thus contribute to the dissolution of his own kingdom. Jesus declares that “it is by the Spirit of God” that he casts out demons and by this they can know that “the kingdom of God has come upon” them (v. 28).

Jesus himself understood that his ability to heal and to restore sight to the blind and speech to the mute and to overcome and destroy the power of Satan lay not in himself or the strength of his own person but in the power of God provided to him through the Holy Spirit. In other words, ***Jesus was himself consciously aware of the ultimate source of his power. He knew himself to be dependent on the power of the Spirit. The Spirit did not work secretly through him.***

Why did Jesus call their sin blasphemy against the “Holy Spirit”? Think about it: If Jesus *himself* performed this miracle, in the power of his *own* divine nature, would not their sin have been against him? They blasphemed the Holy Spirit because they were attributing the *Spirit’s* work to Satan. As far as Jesus is concerned, the proof of the presence of the kingdom of God is the power of the Holy Spirit to bring deliverance to those in bondage to the devil. Here Jesus asserts the presence of the kingdom based on the presence and power of the *Spirit*. It is less *his* performance of an exorcism and more the power of the Spirit through which the exorcism is achieved that attests to the in-breaking of God’s kingdom rule.

Often the word “power” is used to refer to Jesus’ works and words. The significance of this is that ***in Luke’s writings “power” is synonymous with the Holy Spirit*** (see Luke 1:17,35). We see this especially in Luke 5:17 where “the power of the Lord [i.e., the Holy Spirit] was with him to heal.” This is why people were desperate to touch Jesus, “for power came out from him and healed them all” (Luke 6:19; see 8:46). Indeed, often the miracles of Jesus are simply called “powers” (Matt. 11:20; 13:54). The miracles of Jesus were expressions of the *Spirit’s* power (see 1 Cor. 12:10a).

Jesus was widely known and praised for the authority and accuracy of his *teaching*. In Acts 1, Luke declares that it was “through the Holy Spirit” that he issued his commands and offered his instruction to the disciples (v. 2; cf. also Luke 24:19). From this we see that *after* his resurrection Jesus was filled with the Spirit, and from the reservoir of wisdom and power supplied by the Spirit he issued new commands to the disciples. If this be true of Jesus *after* his resurrection, how much more so *before* it! The Spirit of God communicated the words of God the Father to the Son of God that he in turn passed on to his followers. Jesus depended on the Spirit to supply him with the wisdom and insights into the mind of God that formed the substance of his teaching. In this regard, see especially John 5:19-20,30-32; 7:16-18; 8:26; 8:38; 12:49; and 14:10. We also know that Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10:21) and that even his resolve to offer himself on the cross for us was “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14).

#### *The Impartation of Peace, Power, and Purpose*

Now, why is all this so important for you and me? It is of critical importance because the first thing Jesus did upon rising from the dead was to pass on to his disciples by impartation the very same Holy Spirit who had indwelt and empowered him throughout his earthly life and ministry! Jesus appeared to them, imparted peace to them, breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit”!

***The point is that the mission of Jesus is not over. It merely passes into a new phase. Jesus continues the mission given him by his Father by sending forth his disciples in the same power with/by which the Father sent him forth, i.e., the power of the Holy Spirit.***

He also twice said, “***Peace be with you***” (vv. 19, 21). What are we to make of this? Is Jesus merely passing along a standard greeting? Is he saying the same thing that you and I so often say to one another as we part company? Does it actually mean anything? Does it actually change anything? Yes.

Jesus isn’t simply making a statement of fact. ***He is actually and literally and truthfully imparting peace into the lives of his disciples.*** He isn’t saying, “I hope you will be at peace in the days ahead,” or “The peace of God reigns in your heart,” or any such thing. He is truly ***giving*** them peace. He is taking from the peace that is in his own heart and experience and infusing it into theirs. This isn’t just a theological declaration. It is an ***experiential impartation***, as a result of which they now have the very peace of Jesus exerting a transforming and empowering influence on how they think and speak and act.

And that same act of impartation is available to you and me today. He said to them then and he says to us today, “Here, receive the peace of God. Feel it. Live in its calming influence. Enjoy its power to bring true tranquility to your heart. Let this peace instill confidence in you in terms of your relationship with the Father, with me, and with the Holy Spirit.” We today can ask God to do the very same thing for ourselves and for others. “Peace be with you” is a way of asking God, through the Holy Spirit, to infuse into your very soul the calming presence of Jesus Christ.

By the way, it is especially comforting to know that Jesus chooses to show up when his disciples were afraid. They were terrified, shivering in fear behind closed doors. It is then that Jesus makes his presence known. He shows up to replace their fear with peace and to overcome their cowardice and weakness by imparting to them the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Father filled Jesus with the Spirit.

But Jesus didn’t stop with imparting peace. ***He also imparts power.*** He goes on to impart into them the living, abiding, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit himself. There is considerable controversy over what Jesus actually meant and did, so let me explain what is going on. In Acts the Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection, whereas here in John 20 the Holy Spirit appears to come on the day of the resurrection. Are John and Luke in conflict? No.

First, these are *not* contradictory accounts of the same event: in John we have a secret, restricted gathering, at evening, of the disciples only, and Jesus is personally present; but in Acts we have a public gathering, in the middle of the morning, with the entire Jerusalem congregation present, but Jesus is absent.

Second, John 20:22 does not describe their “regeneration” or “new birth”. They were already “clean” (John 13:10); their names were already written down in heaven (Luke 10:20); Peter had openly testified that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:16-17; cf. John 16:30); and in John 17:8-19 Jesus refers to them as already belonging to the Father. Thus, this impartation of the Spirit is not related to their conversion but to their commission (“I also send you”, v. 21).

Third, the *coming* of the Spirit is directly dependent on the *going* of the Son. See John 7:37-39 and 16:7. The sending of the Holy Spirit is contingent on the ascension of the Son. Jesus is portrayed here as not yet having ascended (John 20:17). Therefore, this is *not* a “Johannine Pentecost”.

Fourth, “breathing” is obviously symbolic. *Pneuma* may be translated “wind,” “breath,” “air,” and “spirit” (cf. Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 37:2-4,9). Just as a lump of clay from the earth or a pile of bones lying dry and dead in a valley came to life by the breath of God, so also the followers of Jesus are being empowered with a new spiritual energy by that same breath of God.

There are, then, three possible interpretations of what Jesus did:

(1) Some contend that this was a genuine and ***full anointing*** of the Spirit and must not be played off against the events of Acts 2. If true, there would be two occasions on which the Spirit was imparted with power. This is doubtful.

(2) Others argue that this constituted a *preliminary imparting* of the Spirit, in anticipation of the complete gift that would come at Pentecost. Calvin referred to John 20:22 as a “sprinkling” of the Holy Spirit and Acts 2 as a “saturation”! Luke 24:49 clearly teaches that at Pentecost the followers of Jesus would receive the fullness of divine power = the Holy Spirit. Therefore, whatever occurred in John 20:22, it was at most a foretaste of Pentecost, not the “full meal”; it was at most a *transitional empowering* of the disciples to get them from Easter to Pentecost.

(3) Others insist that there was no actual impartation of the Holy Spirit. Rather, John 20:22 is an *acted parable*, i.e., a symbolic promise of the coming power of the Holy Spirit that is not fulfilled until the day of Pentecost.

In sum: it matters little if this was a partial endowment of power in anticipation of Pentecost or simply a symbolic act or prophetic parable pointing forward to Pentecost. The fact remains that *the principal concern of the Son after his resurrection is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church for the perpetuation of the divine mission he initiated.*

I want to make one primary point of application. We should not read this text in John or the many texts cited as if they were only a historical relic, a by-gone record of ages past in the experience of one man. The fact is, *the Holy Spirit that was in Jesus is also the Holy Spirit in us!* John’s point is that the mission of Jesus is not over. It merely passes into a new phase. Jesus continues the mission given him by his Father by sending forth his disciples (you and me!) in the same power with and by which the Father sent him forth, i.e., the power of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 1:21 Paul deliberately juxtaposes two words to highlight our position and power as the called of God: “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ [*christon*], and has anointed (or ‘christed’) [*chrisas*] us.” Or one could even translate it this way: “Now he who establishes us with you in *the anointed one* and *anointed* us is God.” Thus, just as Jesus said of himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” (Luke 4:18), so likewise Christians are spoken of as anointed ones because we too have received the Holy Spirit and are thus set apart and empowered to serve God and authorized to act on his behalf. Similarly, John says in his first epistle (1 John 2:18-22, 27-28) that although we are humans, not gods, yet in a sense we may rightly be called God’s “christs”, his “anointed ones”, because we have received the same Spirit as did Jesus.

***What conclusion may we draw from this? Simply this: the very same Holy Spirit of God who anointed, indwelt, and empowered Jesus to do everything we read about in the gospels has also anointed, indwells, and empowers you and me to continue the mission that the Father had given him!***

Jesus imparts his peace to us and fills us with the Holy Spirit precisely so that we would be empowered and authorized to preach the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. This *purpose* is what we see in v. 23, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:23).

Needless to say, this doesn’t mean you and I have the power or privilege of actually causing people’s sins to be forgiven. Only God the Father, through the work of God the Son on the cross, can do that. What Jesus means is that when we are faithful to preach the gospel and explain to people the terms on which their sins may be forgiven, we may truly declare them either to be forgiven or not. If people respond to the proclamation of the gospel with repentance and true faith in Jesus, we have the authority to declare to them: “Your sins have been forgiven you.” But if they reject the gospel and repudiate the terms by which a person may be reconciled to God, we have the authority to declare to them: “Your sins are not forgiven.”

Our words do not create forgiveness or judgment. Our words merely communicate as Christ’s representatives what he has done and the terms on which salvation and entrance into the kingdom are possible. In summary, “When you tell people about what I have done, speaking my word, about my work, in the power of my Spirit, I am the one speaking through you, so that if anyone believes your word, I forgive their sins. And if any does not believe your words, I don’t forgive them.”

In conclusion, how does this remarkable passage affect the way you do ministry? What impact does it have on your expectations when you pray for someone? Knowing that the Spirit who indwelt, empowered, and anointed Jesus now indwells, empowers, and has anointed us ought to change everything dramatically!