

The Holy Spirit – The Lord, the Giver of Life.

Today we start looking at the third section of the Creed.

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Lord, and giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified,
He has spoken through the Prophets,*

In particular thinking about the Spirit as “the Lord, the giver of life”

That phrase, like the others, is there to affirm that the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, truly and fully God like the Father and the Son, in the face of those who in the fourth century wanted to think of the Spirit as a created being or an impersonal force. [cf. Bray p. 634]

It affirms that with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the LORD of the Old Testament

And that just as the Father and the Son have life in themselves and give life to whom they will [John 5:21, 26], so does the Spirit.

But what I want to think with you about is why that is such good news, why it assures us that the One God, Father, Son and Spirit saves completely as God the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

And why through the Spirit’s work that salvation, that life He gives, is so rich.

And I want to start our thinking about that, not with God, but with us – the way we are, and the big picture that tells us why we are the way we are and our need for life.

Our Need for Life

Thinking about us

How would you describe us humans? Summarize the human condition?

We are perplexing, a puzzle often to ourselves.

I mean, the same blood runs in the veins of the Doctors of Medicin sans Frontieres and those who wielded the machetes in the Rwandan genocide.

We’re capable of the self-sacrifice I see in the women and men who diligently visit their dementing spouses day after day at Villa Maria, and the selfishness that walks out and leaves a partner alone with a disabled child

We can be zealous for the pursuit of truth, yet cling to the most fantastic superstitions – people do read and believe the astrological predictions in the papers

We are a joy and grief to ourselves.

A writer named Blaise Pascal summed humanity up in this way:

“What kind of freak then is man? How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious, judge of all things, feeble earth worm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error, glory and refuse of the universe.”

Rembrandt and Hitler, Mozart and Stalin, Mother Teresa and Pol Pot, Catherine Hamlin pioneering fistula surgery and cosmetic surgery cowboys operating for money

That jostle of contradictions – is us humans.

We know it in our own experience, where we can love, and be consumed with hatred of others; think clearly, and also be driven by irrational anger or desire

How would you describe humanity?

A wonder, a wretch

And a long grief, a history of blood and brokenness and many, many deaths, that catches us up in its flow.

Behind this experienced reality at the core of our existence, the joy and grief, the achievement and frustration, the belonging and loss, the exaltation and shame

Scripture points to two events recorded at the beginning of the Bible, the fact of our creation, and the fact of our fall.

Us in the Big Story – Created and Fallen

We are a wonder because each of us is made in the image of God [Genesis 1:26-27]

Made to relate to the eternal God, to each other, and to the non-human world entrusted to our care

And equipped for those relationships with thought and speech, creativity and moral judgement, a capacity to find delight in the world and help each other

People with eternity in our hearts and the universe, from the smallest microbe to the farthest star, open to our enquiring gaze

Yet flawed, flawed at the heart of our life as individuals and as a community because of our desire to be gods

Even if you haven't read the story of the Fall in Genesis 3 you are probably familiar with Adam, Eve and the snake

But let me remind you of how it goes

The tempter was offering the woman something much greater than a piece of fruit.

When the woman tells the serpent God had said they must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [2:17], and if they did they would die, the serpent says

"You will not die. In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [Genesis 3:4-5]

Being like God – that is what was on offer

Being the one who can make the rules, who can decide for yourself what is right and wrong, who can shape reality, moral reality, to suit yourself

And to achieve this great prize, one the woman, seeing the fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable for obtaining wisdom [Genesis 3:6], concluded suited her very well, her appetites and desires and thirst for knowledge

All she and Adam had to do was disobey God who had said 'you must not eat it for on the day that you eat from it you will surely die' [2:17].

All they had to do was eat – not believe God, not trust God – but something that came so naturally – just eat

And they did

And from that time on our relationships have been complicated by our selfishness – by both our desire to have all around us serve us and our happiness, and our conflict with those who won't

And Our labours and loves have been condemned to meaninglessness by the certainty of death and returning to the dust – and we know the grief of that.

Listen to the author of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 2: ¹⁶ For, just like the fool, there is no lasting remembrance of the wise, since in the days to come both will be forgotten. How is it that the wise person dies just like the fool? ¹⁷ Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. For everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

And by that disobedience of God we have been separated from the living God who is the source of our life and all the good we enjoy in Creation, and on whose will every breath we take depends, driven out of the garden and unable to find our way back.

For as a race we are still Adam's children

We have embraced the lie that only by disobeying God, doing things our way, not His, whether for example in relation to money, or marriage, or sexuality, can we find real life, reach our full potential, fulfill our most cherished desires

And so we live reckoning the true God our enemy – whose presence must be marginalised, His greatness minimized, His commands rejected and His person murdered

At the heart of the human condition is the pursuit of what we can never be - gods, for we are creatures, not God,

Our deep seated hostility to the claims of our creator

And God's just response to our rebellion, His response that upholds His word which both brought into being and sustains Creation – our death.

How can the consequences of that act, which we live with every day in a disordered creation and disordered relationships, be overcome?

How can relationship with our Creator be renewed, peace restored?

How can the sentence of death be lifted?

You read on in the big story beyond Genesis 3 and you see in response to Adam's sin and its consequences for humanity and all creation God chose one man Abraham [Gen. 12 ff], and his offspring – the people of Israel.

And what we see in their story, as we zoom in on this one family, this one people, is that the issues in humanity's relationship with its creator come clearly into focus, and their history becomes a mirror in which we can see ourselves

God made promises to Abraham and his offspring, entered into relationship with them

And in faithfulness to His promises God blesses and multiplies Abraham's offspring

Rescues them from slavery in Egypt with spectacular works of power – the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea

Then formalizes his relationship with them at Mt Sinai, committing Himself to them to be their God in covenant relationship with the people, giving them His law, the way they should live as His people

And He gives them a land to live in – the promised land

In a sense, Israel had it all when it comes to relating to God

They had experienced God's goodness and kindness in their rescue from Egypt

They experienced his continuing kindness in the provision of the land

And God located His presence amongst them in tabernacle and temple so HE was near to be called upon by them.

And They knew what God expected of them – it was all clear in the covenant

And you might expect seeing God's goodness for themselves, knowing He was not a killjoy but a life giver

Knowing what they had to do to live a good life with God whose blessing and protection was their prosperity and peace

You might expect They would just get on with it and keep on enjoying peace and life in God's presence

Dead

But what really happened?

They disobeyed deliberately – even before Moses had time to bring the tablets with the ten commandments down from the mountain – and repeatedly.

When God had said they were to have no other gods, they went and worshipped other gods, dead idols, time and again

When God sent them prophets to call them back to himself and warn them of the dangers of their idolatry – they repeatedly ignored them or worse

And they suffered the disastrous consequences those prophets had warned them of – drought, famine, oppression under foreign rulers, repeated war, and ultimately they lost that good land

Reading the history of Israel is a bit like watching the slow train wreck of a drug addict's life

The problem is identified

The necessary intervention is offered

But like an addict they seem unable to heed, to act on, the repeated pleas, threats and warnings of what would happen if they didn't change

Why?

Why wasn't the law able to give them life and peace?

Why were the prophet's ignored?

Why so unresponsive that their very existence was threatened?

In the context of His final pleas to His people to turn back and live being ignored, and when as a consequence they have suffered the ultimate penalty – Jerusalem destroyed, their king captive, the people exiled

God speaks to His people through the prophet Ezekiel – and He pinpoints the problem

Ezekiel 36: ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

The people have a heart of stone

Which is a great picture, and a sad reality.

When we remodelled the garden at Viewbank I had the opportunity to get to know some rocks fairly well.

They were fairly big ones and I needed to move them

What were my options?

Persuasion – the new position is more comfortable, has a better view

Threats – move or it's the tip for you

Of course not – I used the dingo, because everyone knows rocks, stones are unresponsive to threats or persuasion, unresponsive because they are dead

The Israelites, in their heart, the willing, thinking core of their being, were dead to God

They couldn't hear

Weren't interested

Couldn't change themselves, even when the outcome of their refusal to listen to God was so clearly bad.

And dead to God, they were dying – had lost land and community, and were without hope. [Eccles. 9:4-5]

And the Israelites are like this – with hearts of stone – not because they were different from us, but because they are like us, they are us – children of Adam

Their history, as I said, is a mirror in which we can see ourselves in our relationship with our creator.

Theirs is our situation in life. Left to ourselves, in relation to God – we are dead

As Paul says to the Ephesians

Ephesians 2: And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

Dead to God

Unresponsive to His word

Unable to change

And so unable to escape the death that awaits us all

A heart of stone is a radical diagnosis of the human problem, but one abundantly confirmed by Israel's history, and our own.

And it is one we can't treat effectively by ourselves

Changing your heart isn't a matter of being better informed, knowing more – Israel knew God's will clearly

Or a better environment – Israel had the land of promise

Or better religious rituals – Israel had the priests and temple

Even of witnessing miracles

You hear of people occasionally, in desperation, removing their own appendix. No one can give themselves a heart transplant

It's a terminal exercise

We can't give ourselves the new hearts, the living hearts we need

Life Promised and Given

God's radical solution

But with the radical diagnosis God proposes a radical cure

Ezekiel 36: ²⁵I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

There is forgiveness – being cleansed from all impurity, but forgiveness is not enough for new life – and God promise more

Heart surgery

The gift of a new heart, a living heart, which is to give us new life – where we are no longer addicted to rejecting God, where we can know the freedom of doing God's will v. 27

A new life where we have stopped trying to be gods and acknowledge the Creator as the only God, where we honour His name, His revelation of Himself, by believing what He says

How will God do this – v. 27

By giving us His Spirit

God Himself giving us life, animating us in a life of trusting obedience, the life we were made for, with His own Spirit.

This is a cure only God can perform. No one else can give us the powerful life-giving Spirit, and so God is our only hope

The only life humanity has is life from Adam, life committed to turning away from God, lived in defiance of God

And so everything else we think might change us, that originates with us – philosophy, meditation, self-denial, turning over a new leaf, will fall short of what is needed, is unable to give us this new life where we love God and honour His revelation. That life that must come into us from outside of us, from God

Without this we will keep on reaping what we sow and go closer and closer to the abyss of eternal destruction – unable to hear, to understand, to change direction

Jesus and the Spirit

And what God promised, HE – Father, Son and Spirit, has brought into being, through the Father sending the Son who gives the Spirit to those who believe in Him.

Jesus, like Ezekiel, spoke of the necessity of this new heart, this new life

John 3:⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. ⁸ The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

The Lord Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus of the meaning of the prophecy of Ezekiel. You must have a new life, a new birth, if you are to live with God, live in His Kingdom.

Living in the Kingdom can sound abstract to us, but that was the desire of Nicodemus, for he knew that God's kingdom was peace, security, justice, life, the end of death and the oppression of evil. It is living with God as we were created to do.

Nicodemus longed to live in the Kingdom, but he was told this necessary new birth is not in our power to produce – flesh gives birth to flesh, the life of this age to the life of this age. Only the Spirit can give birth to spirit. This new birth is the sovereign work of the Spirit of God, whose effects, like the wind, will be known, but is not subject to our control.

WE must have this new birth, but we can't create it ourselves.

What hope is there?

Thankfully as the gospel goes on we see that the Lord Jesus teaches us where to turn for this new birth.

In John 7 he says

John 7: ³⁷ On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." ³⁹ He said this about the Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

He promised the Spirit to all who believed in Him, the Spirit who is an inexhaustible fountain of life. It is to the Lord Jesus we must look for the Spirit, for the gift of new life.

Jesus promised the Spirit and He also taught that the Spirit's coming to those who believed in Him was dependent on His being glorified, on His completing the work the Father had given Him in His hour.

That work was His dying on the cross, the hour when, as He said to Nicodemus, He is lifted up on the cross as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, lifted up for all to find life who would look and live [John 17:1, 5; 12:27-32, 3:13-14].

And when that work is completed and He had gone to the Father Jesus said He would send the Spirit to His followers,

John 16: ⁷ Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.

And the Spirit would be another Counsellor with Jesus' followers forever, who will remain with His people and will be in us

John 14: ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. ¹⁷ He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn't see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you.

The Spirit is the other Counsellor because like our Lord He will protect Jesus' followers from the world, guide them into truth, and sustain their witness to the world, and in whose presence their Lord is present with them, just as in Jesus' presence the disciples were in the presence of God

John 14:16-17, 25-26, 16:12-14

And we read in Acts that what He promised, the ascended, reigning, Lord Jesus does [Acts 2:32-33],

Acts 2: ³² "God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this. ³³ Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.

The Father, Son and Spirit one in bringing new life to believers as the Father gives the Spirit to the Son, and the Spirit is given by Jesus to His followers.

And as Jesus promised in John 7 the Spirit is not just for the first disciples. It is for all who believe in Jesus, believe that the crucified and risen Jesus is Lord and Christ.

As Peter says to the crowd in Acts 2

[Acts 2:38-39]

Acts 2: ³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus who has cleansed us by His blood the Spirit is present with believers as the Spirit of life, new life from God, Jesus' great gift to all who believe in Him.

The Life the Spirit gives

And this new life is experienced in the reversal of the effects of Adam's sin, God doing in us what we could never do ourselves

In place of distrust and alienation, resentment of God, there is a new relationship of trust and love, where we call upon and know God as our Father, for the Spirit gives us the new life of God's sons and daughters [Romans 8:14-17, Galatians 4:6], and assures us of that life

Romans 8: ¹⁴For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

In the place of distance, of being excluded from God's presence, we come in the Spirit to the Father, and are assured we belong to His people, those who are citizens of God's Kingdom [Ephesians 2:18-19]

Ephesians 2: ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,

Where we felt God's commands as a limitation on us and were unable to love God by doing His will, the Spirit gives us both a new desire and a new power to live God's way, to walk in the way of life.

In fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah that God would 'write His law on our hearts', the Spirit changes our hearts so that they incline to do His will which is permanently present in our wills

And We are freed from slavery to the power of sin, from the determination of the flesh, of the life we have inherited from Adam, to rebel against God, that was destroying us.

Romans 7:6, 8:1-4, 13

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, ¹³because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

As Paul says It is by the Spirit that we can put those sinful desires to death, and only by the Spirit,

And where we have new hearts that will show. We are assured that the Spirit is active in our lives to bear its fruit as we give ourselves to the Spirit's work, the fruit of the character of a life pleasing to God, the life of God's children. Galatians 5:16-25

Galatians 5: ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. ²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

But the Spirit does more than overcome the alienation from God and change our hearts to delight in God and His will so that our identity is found in relating to God as His children and not in rebelling against God.

The Spirit of God in us is the guarantee that death, the death of sin, will be overcome by the Spirit Himself being the powerful life of God that will sustain our resurrection life.

Romans 8: ¹⁰Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you.

That risen body is described by Paul as a 'spiritual body', a body that is animated by the life we receive from Christ, the life He gives us in giving us the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ

*1 Corinthians 15: ⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead: Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; ⁴³ sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; ⁴⁴ sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ So it is written, **The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.** ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual.*

The Spirit as the power of that new life, of resurrection life at the right time, is then spoken of as the downpayment of all God's promises – the deposit that guarantees the rest of all that is promised,

Eph. 1: ¹³ In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. ¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

and as the firstfruits of the age to come, that first part of the harvest that is both present enjoyment and anticipation of all that will come, the fulness of the promises in the resurrection

Romans 8: ²³ Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

And as down payment and first fruits the Spirit sustains us in a present and real hope, a sure hope, that keeps us longing for and moving towards the heavenly kingdom.

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Lord, and giver of life,*

We believe, Because every believer in Jesus has experienced the life the Spirit brings,

The life the Spirit brings is experienced, as Paul teaches in Corinthians, in listening to God's word with understanding, and in believing the gospel confessing Jesus is Lord [1 Cor. 2:12-14, 12:3]

It is experienced in crying out to God as our Father

In our characters being changed

In living with our lives sustained and directed by the hope for what we do not yet see, our resurrection

We are not passive in these experiences

We believe the word preached

Our spirit Cries out with God's spirit

We put to death, we keep in step with the Spirit

We give ourselves to that longing

But our work, our activity, has its origins in the Spirit's activity, and when we confess the Spirit as the giver of life we also confess that without the Spirit we would have no life, but still have that heart of stone

Having Life, living Life - A cause for joy

WE believe, and we rejoice in the Spirit

Rejoice that God is at work to keep His promise, to fulfill His purpose to have a people for Himself through whom His name will be honoured, and pours Himself out in the pouring out of the Spirit to bring that about

Rejoice to know God through God as the Spirit opens our eyes to Jesus' glory

To be moved to God by God as the Spirit gives us a heart to love Him

To be changed into the image of the Son through His mighty work in us

To have the Spirit of the Son to raise us to share the resurrection life of the Son

Believing in the Spirit, we Rejoice in God – Father, Son and Spirit – the One who saves, and saves completely,

But as well as being a cause for joy, believing in the Spirit is a cause for godliness.

Scripture warns us that those who receive life from the Spirit must live that life with the Spirit, live lives that are consistent with the Spirit's presence in us

Hear those warnings this morning

Do not grieve the Spirit Eph. 4:30-32

*Ephesians 4:*³⁰ *And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.* ³² *And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.*

How we speak to others is not a matter of whatever we feel like at the time. As believers we never have a right to wield anger like a club, to control with shouting

Not advice, not a matter of how your were brought up, of what you think others are used to

The Spirit is with you, and hears every word you speak

And only speaking to build up others, speaking the truth in love, is fitting

Again, 1 Cor. 6

*1 Corinthians 6:*¹⁸ *Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.* ¹⁹ *Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,* ²⁰ *for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.*

Hopefully you do not dare to commit sexual immorality in the presence of God, in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Like the Corinthians we do live in a world where sexual immorality was not just tolerated but celebrate. But we must be different for we are different, God's Spirit dwells in us.

Or when James is rebuking the greed of those he is writing to, their love of the world and their covetousness

He writes

"Or do you think it's without reason that the Scripture says: The Spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely.' – that God is zealous to protect the love of His people for Himself

We believe in the Holy Spirit because trusting Jesus, from Jesus, we have receive the Spirit of life

So heed the warnings. Let the Spirit turn you away from anger and malice and controlling and abusive speech, from sexual immorality, from greed and covetousness.

Why provoke the Lord to jealousy

As you live by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit – march to the beat of the Spirit's drum by saying no to sin, and being changed by Him to live lives of love