

**“The Spirit of truth” a sermon based on Acts 17:22-31 and John 14:15-21
preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 17 May
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It can be accessed from the Knox Church YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYksSjG0llf00NeogNIGs7A>

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When we make a significant life-choice that people close to us might not understand, how do we explain it to them? Most of us wrestle with this challenge at some stage in our life. I did in my first year at University in Auckland. I was in a University hostel and for the first time living close to Christians. As I got to know them, I realised that I wanted what they had. So one night I knelt beside my bed and prayed – God I don’t know what they have, but I want it. And my life changed, dramatically. I found a local Presbyterian Church and the people there helped me begin to learn the Christian faith. They gave me a simple Bible I avidly read. The minister visited me in my hostel. I became part of the young adult group with lectures about the faith and a study group and outreach and social events and more.

This was a big transition for me, because I didn’t come from a Christian background, although I had been to Sunday School. After a while, the possibility of baptism was raised. I talked it through with others and spoke with my minister. I participated in classes to learn about baptism and about being Christian. A date was set for the celebration. Then I wrestled with whether to tell my family. I sensed a big gulf between what I was doing and what I had heard them say about religion. In our town, it felt as if religion was strange and religious people were strange. And as I was new to the Christian faith, I wasn’t confident that I could explain what I was doing and why, in ways that would make sense to them. At that time, the gulf felt so big I could not find a way of bridging it. So I didn’t tell them until much later. When I eventually did tell them, naturally, they were disappointed I had not told them earlier. Then something began to happen in our family. A little later, my older sister was baptised in the local church, and then a little later my mother decided to become part of that congregation. And my father shifted in his views as well. I learned that God was at work even if I didn’t have everything worked out with the right words.

Over the last few weeks, people have been sharing in online worship who are wondering about faith and perhaps you feel that you need better words to make sense of it, for yourself and for those around you. Studies have shown that many younger people especially are curious about religion and go looking online. I think every Christian wrestles with how to explain their experience of Jesus, including to people who do not share their faith. It is also a challenge in New Zealand where many people do not know a Christian. As Jesus prepared his followers for his death, he wanted them to see how they were part of an ongoing movement of the Spirit of God. They were not alone, not orphaned as he put it. They were going to be put on the spot but they needn't be anxious about their vulnerability.

The gospel of John has a unique view of the Holy Spirit. I will give you another Advocate, Jesus said, the Spirit of truth. The word is *paracletos*, one who accompanies and speaks for the other, a friend of the court, a representative, a communicator of what is true. Jesus speaks of himself as a *paracletos* and he says that when he departs, he will leave a replacement *paracletos*, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit. Jesus emphasises how much he is in the life of his followers with startling words - "... you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you." God the loving parent in each of us, our life as part of the life of Jesus, and the life of Jesus in us.

If only I had realised that when I was 18 years old, I would not have been so anxious about how to bridge the gulf between my family and me. God would do it, and I could relax a little in not carrying the responsibility of it all, although I could share curiosity, and raise questions, and chip in thoughts when the opportunity arose – as it often did. I didn't need to be quiet because I hadn't worked things out or because my life was not perfect. Nor did I have to fit my faith into the frame others used. When Paul speaks of faith to Stoics in Athens, he quotes two Stoic poets. Poets. People who convey truth sideways, a phrase, an image, a fragment, a hint, an invitation. The Spirit of truth is at work in your life now, at this moment, and among those close to you, whether they know it or not, but when they do, well ... life changes. Let's affirm the Spirit's life. Let's celebrate it and be part of what she is doing around us. Thanks be to God.

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