

# Corinthian spirit

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

I have found this sermon and this passage very difficult to prepare for,  
Because the commentators find it very difficult.

Everyone agrees that Paul very suddenly starts using very different language at this part of the epistle,  
The word Spirit appears all the time...

God has revealed to us through the **Spirit**, for the **Spirit** searches out all things  
Even the depths of God  
For what human knows the things of a human except by the **spirit of the human** which is within them.

In the same way, the things of God, no-one knows, unless by **the spirit** of God.

We have not received **the spirit of the world** but **the spirit** which is from God,  
In order that we may know the things of God which he has freely given to us,  
And we do not speak in the teaching of human words of wisdom  
But in the teaching of the **Spirit**  
Interpreting **Spiritual things** to the **Spiritual**  
But the natural human does not accept the things of the **Spirit**  
For they are foolish to him, and he cannot know  
Because they are understood **spiritually**  
But the **spiritual** person discerns all things, but he is not discerned by anyone.

For who has known the mind of the Lord  
In order to instruct him

But we have the mind of Christ.

Now scholars get really vexed by this, because all this talk of Spirit and spiritual things  
And spiritual people

Doesn't feel very scholarly, and very like Paul...  
They feel on safe ground when he is talking about the cross, or the second coming, or the meaning of redemption, or sanctification, or these other words,  
But spiritual - feels to woo woo, feels too touchy feely, feels to out of control  
And it doesn't feel like Paul.

I remember once I was at a meeting of academics to discuss the training for ministers.  
And we were talking about the subjects they would need to learn...  
Everyone agreed that they would need to learn about Church history, and the basics of systematic theology, and the New Testament and the Old Testament  
These are all standard subjects...  
And as something new, we said that people need to be able to understand the mission of the Church in contemporary Scotland  
And everyone agreed that the Church is in danger of becoming irrelevant, stuck in a bygone era, and we couldn't train to be a minister in the 1950s but a minister in the 2020s...

But at the heart of our proposal to the academics was the central understanding that ministers should be people of prayer, and discernment,  
That they should have spirituality, that they should be grounded in a sense of the spirit of God...

And at this the protestant, Scottish university academics - very very fine people,  
They said - how would you teach this

This life of prayer,  
The things of the Spirit,  
It is not on our standard curriculum..

Now if you went to an pentecostal bible college, this would not be a question that would be asked  
If you went to a Catholic seminary, particularly one influenced by the Jesuits, you would not be  
asked this question  
For people in these places, the life of the Spirit,  
Is what they breathe  
But us protestants have evacuated this from our tradition..

What is it about cerebral, respectable, academics, getting queasy when we talk about the life of  
the Spirit? What is the problem here.

And so what they do is they go out of their way to explain that there are mystery religions in  
Corinth, cults, and that Paul is borrowing the language of the cults and the mystery religions and  
the temples, and using it against them, subtly subverting it.... This is what is referred to as the  
teaching of human wisdom in verse 13.

The problem is that if this is an attack on mystery religions, it is very very subtle indeed,  
And our Paul, St Paul, is not given to subtlety when he has something in his sights...

Moreover there is something very much lurking in this passage which is an obvious target... it is  
all over this section of 1 Corinthians...

It is the idea that there is a spiritual energy behind the system of rank and power and status which  
is at work in Corinth... Corinth was a very status driven city, full of people desperate to make their  
mark, we said this before it is like Glasgow, and something of the spirituality of Glasgow, the  
Glasgow boys with their dark tinted beamers and their designer shoes and their plasma screens..

This has a spirituality to it  
In Glasgow it goes back to the Tobacco Lords..

In Corinth it is linked to wealth, and power and status,  
In Jerusalem when the powers killed Jesus, it was linked to power and status and religion as a  
way of control, what Marx would later call the opium of the masses.

And it is this spirit which he has in mind, the Spirit of this age, the spirit of this world...

It is the spirit of materialism which confines this world to all that there is  
And that what you have to do is fight for survival in this world,  
To crush the weak, and to be strong and to achieve  
And to be clever, and to achieve rank,  
And Paul says that this whole system is undone by the story of Jesus  
Who took the lowliest, most shameful form of death  
Died on a cross.

That I think is the spirituality of the human, of the natural, which Paul does away with here.  
And it is opposite, is not to be morally instructed to be humble, or to be intellectually informed as  
to the need for social equality,  
Instead its opposite, is the thing that we were striving for in these ministers.

It is to be grounded in the life of the Spirit...

So here I think is what is going on in 1 Corinthians 2, in this section...

Paul is telling a remarkable story about God  
That God came to us, in an act of outrageous generous love  
And living a humble life  
And that in dying on a shameful cross

He forgives us all our sins  
He offers us a path for living  
And he undoes all the systems of rank and status and power of this world

That in Jesus he has given us very self,  
And how has this been revealed  
It has been revealed by the Spirit of God,  
The Spirit within which reveals the deepest part of the nature of God  
Which is love, and grace, and embrace, and giving up all to win us back  
And this revelation is like the way that the human spirit makes the human known...

We didn't receive the spirit of this world... with its materialism, its nothingness, its status...  
Be we received within us the Spirit of God,  
Through which we know all the good gifts which God has given to us.

We don't speak in human teaching, but in spiritual teaching, this move of the spirit,  
Connecting with us, within us, and within God,  
This union with God  
And the natural just doesn't get this  
This is a spiritual act, it feels foolish to someone who is locked into this world  
But the one who has this openness to the spirit, discerns,  
And when this happens they fear no one's judgement  
No one can instruct Christ  
But Christ has given us his spirit  
So that we have his mind within us.

This spiritual life is one of deep connection into the place of God...

Now I want to talk about some research this morning that comes from Dr Lisa Miller, of Columbia University  
Who talks about the way that we are spiritual people.

We are all hard wired for spirituality, to connect with God,  
With a higher power,  
With the life beyond...

And that this is genetic - 1/3 shaped by the genes - all of us have it  
And 2/3 shaped by our upbringing.

That spirituality one of the biggest signs of it, is that it connects us not only with God, but also  
with our neighbours - kindness and generosity - is one of the biggest correlates of spirituality.

When you discern the kindness of God, you become kind  
When you discern that God is generous - to use the words here, gives freely - we give freely  
When you discern the love of God, you become more loving.

Surveys have shown that young people who have a spiritual connection  
Are 82% less likely to commit suicide  
As she says, if she knew that there was a pill that would reduce suicide by 82% then she would get  
that  
So why not spirituality.

And there is an interesting as well about science...  
That some scientists have recently sought to disprove spirituality  
Sought to show that all there is the material, the things that you can touch, feel, knock, and trip  
over,  
But scientific discovery, often comes in spiritual moment, in moments of transcendence.

So how do we connect with this spiritual life...

I think first of all for us it begins with the story of Jesus  
The teaching of wisdom which Paul refers to here.

Simply to reflect on the story, that God came amongst us  
The bigness of God compressed into one human  
A remarkable, humble, challenging man called Jesus  
And that through his choice,  
He confronted the religious powers of his day  
And was killed in the most excruciating and shameful way  
But that on the third day,  
He rose  
And appeared to his friends

That there is a story in God  
That God is presence  
And it is the God of Jesus Christ who is present...

And then let your Spirit connect..

I have spoken before about the Jesus prayer..  
"Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

And on peaceful places, places of quiet, and reflection.

And of Jesus own words,  
"How much will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask it."

And find the place where your spirit is blown by the Holy Spirit  
By the Spirit blowing you into this story

Teaching you,  
Informing you  
Changing you  
Blessing you

Taking you away from the material  
The strivings  
The greedy  
The fearful  
The proud

The place of Jesus  
Who is still here  
Known by the Spirit  
And when this happens

You will have the mind of Christ.

I think part of this is about trust, particularly in suffering..

Suffering is the too often the gateway to newness, to understanding..

This fits with Paul is saying here, it is the path of loss, of having to grapple for a sense of God  
when everything around you feels broken..

When you have lost everything and it seems that only the Spirit of God is left..

This too is the place where we come to the mind of Christ.

AMEN