

Series: The Familiar Stranger  
**The Dove; The Spirit Gives Power**

John 14:12-14

Sermon by Men's Pastor Josh Brage  
 Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado  
 Sunday morning, June 7, 2026

A reading from John 14:12-14: "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father, and I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it," the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Josh: Thank you, Neil. It is so great to have you reading scripture today. Good morning. My name is Josh. I am so excited to be here this morning. Good to see everybody. If you don't know me, I am from Lincoln, Nebraska. Go Big Red. Needless to say, I am not a big sailor, but let's imagine today. Let's use a boat today. Let's imagine that we are all on a ship, one of those old wooden ships, the ones that used to explore the globe, think of Pirates of the Caribbean, and we are all on this ship together, and we are sailing the ocean. We are on new missions. We are trying to find strange new worlds. We are trying to explore the globe and build the map of the world, but all of a sudden, one afternoon, the wind dies down. All of a sudden, our ship comes to a complete stop, nothing but silence and sun and just the quiet noise of maybe the waves hitting our boat. Apparently, there is a nautical term for this idea. They have all the best terms, don't they? It is called, our ship is becalmed. It is "becalmed." Our ship has become becalmed. I could not think of a better metaphor for a lot of our Christian lives. We are sailing together. We are all on the boat together. We are sailing around the world. We want to be on mission. We want to be heading towards great new things, but somehow along the way, we have run out of power. The wind has stopped, and we have become becalmed. I wonder if you feel like that at all today.

I am in that boat. I live a very full, very good, very busy life here in Littleton. I love living in Littleton, Colorado, but when I am honest with myself, and I take a step back or maybe spend a couple of weeks preparing to preach a sermon on the power of the Holy Spirit, I am very aware that even though my life is so full of good things, that something may be missing, and I would say that there is a big part of me that is hungry for something more. I want more of His power at work in my life. I wonder if that is any of you this morning, so it begs the question, how did we end up living a Christian life without very much power? I have a couple of diagnoses, but here is just one. I think sometimes we have overprioritized the intellectual. I think we really, really like the doctrine. We like the religion side. We like Bible studies. We like learning together, but somewhere along the way, we started to think that the emotional side of faith was a little bit too strange. The emotional, the experiential side of faith maybe was not for us. It was too weird, too unpredictable, too out of our control. I think somewhere along the way, we just decided we like the mind part better, but here is the problem with that. No one actually lives their life from the head down. No one does. No one. We live our life falling in love. We live our life grieving those that we lose. We live our life chasing our ambitions and our passions. There are people in this room who moved here to chase jobs and chase dreams of what they wanted here in Colorado. We do not live lives up here. We live lives here, and then somehow when we come into faith, we come into church, we think it is only about

up here, and then we wonder why our faith feels so disconnected from our real life. I think we have unintentionally created something that has left us becalmed.

I do not think this is how the Christian life was designed to be lived. The Christian life was specifically designed to be lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life was specifically designed to be lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our prayer for the series and my prayer for this morning comes from Ephesians chapter one. We have heard these verses a few times, but I just want to pray it again really quickly. I pray today that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened, in order that we would know His incomparably great power for us who believe, great power for us, for you and for me. That's our prayer today.

So, to understand what the normative, formative, the main point of the Christian experience is, I think we need to start with the guy who did it best. I think we need to start with Jesus. Jesus lived the most perfect life. He showed us how to do it, and we have to look to Him for what to expect, for how to lead us in this life. So, let's start with Jesus, and here is the first thing we see in his life. It is that Jesus was the most Spirit-filled person to ever walk this Earth. Jesus at some point, He humbled Himself, He gave up his divinity, He came to Earth, and along the way He got filled with the Holy Spirit, which then empowered his life and his ministry. We see the Spirit's hand all over his life, most specifically right at the beginning of his ministry, at the baptism scene. I love this scene. John the Baptist sees Jesus coming down, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God." John then baptizes Jesus, and as he pulls Jesus up out of the water, the gospel of Luke says that the Holy Spirit descends like a dove. This is very, very specific, very, very intentional, creation language. The first time we see the Spirit at work at all in scripture is in Genesis, when it says his Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos as God created the world out of his goodness and his generosity. We see the Spirit at creation, and here in Luke we see the Spirit again hovering over Jesus, as God recreates the world through his Son. This is very peculiar image. This is very specific imagery.

The Spirit then fills Jesus and leads Him immediately into the wilderness. Who remembers this scene? We think that God is really interested in our comfort, don't we? But the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and immediately leads Him into the wilderness, to be tempted by Satan. This is a really good word for some of us. Some of us might feel like we are in the wilderness today. Just so you know, the Spirit is just as active and just as present in the wilderness as He is in those mountaintop-type experiences we have. If you are in the wilderness, remember that He has not forgotten you, and He will not forget you.

Jesus then comes out of the wilderness and returns to Galilee, returns to his hometown, and He goes to the synagogue to teach for the first time, and He is handed a scroll, and there He reads aloud, He opens to Isaiah, and He reads aloud a direct manifesto for his life and his ministry. This is a description of what the power of the Holy Spirit is going to do in and through the life of Jesus. Let's read it together here. Luke 4: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This is a manifesto for Jesus' ministry, and it is a description of how the power of the Holy Spirit moves through Jesus' life, good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom, and this is what we see throughout his ministry. Jesus' life was led by the Spirit as He went around healing little girls and mothers-in-law, as He went around confronting corrupt government systems and officials, as He corrected and rescued people from demonic activity.

Every step along the way, throughout His miracles, the Holy Spirit also provided Jesus with joy, with clarity, with comfort, and with endurance, as Jesus ultimately endured all the way to the cross. On the cross, Jesus does the most Spirit-filled thing ever, which is to conquer sin, death, hell, and the grave for us, and then on the third day, the Holy Spirit raises Jesus Christ from the dead. Our gospel, the gospel that saves us, is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then in John 14, Jesus says this. Neil just read it: “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I have been doing.” We just saw the works. We have seen the works throughout Jesus’ ministry. “They are the same works that I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so the Father may be glorified. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” “Greater things than these.” Paul mentioned this idea in our first message of this series. Of all the things that this passage can mean, greater things than these, it can’t mean less than or fewer. It actually seems that Jesus’ expectation for you and me in our normal ordinary church Christian experience is that we would experience regular, greater miracles, works, healings, and all sorts of different things like Jesus experienced in His ministry. Jesus’ expectation is that our lives would look similar or greater than his life and ministry. That is his expectation for us.

What this means for us is what the Holy Spirit did in His day, He still wants to do today. The Holy Spirit is still here and moving in power to break addiction. The Holy Spirit is here to break the chains of sin in the human heart. The power of the Holy Spirit is available to heal minds and bodies and spirits and souls. The Holy Spirit is here to initiate and inspire faith in people who never saw it coming. There are stories of this power that I am describing in this room right now, stories where you did not even notice it. You just woke up one day, and faith was in your heart. Or you needed Jesus to show up, and He did by the power of His Holy Spirit. Who has felt that, experienced that power?

The same Spirit that was at work in Jesus is still at work today. He gives us gifts to help us help others. He draws us. He calls us. He sends people to places they never thought they’d go. He asks them to do things they never thought they could, ordinary Christian people empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the normative, expected Christian experience, if you ask Jesus. How is this even possible that that is what I have? Jesus was Jesus. How is this possible that you and I could be expected to see and participate in any of these types of activities? Romans 8: The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. That same Spirit that ignited Jesus’ life and ministry, that same Spirit, one of the most true things about you and me as Christian believers is that Holy Spirit lives embedded within our hearts and our lives. That same Holy Spirit that did all of those amazing things is present and available in our lives today. Amen. The same Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead lives in you, and it lives in me. What this means is that the most distracted among us, the most bored, the driest Christian in this room has available to them, to you, the one who can change everything about your life, if we would just ask.

So, what happens when we shut the door on that? What happens? When we shut the door on the Spirit, we may decide actively, no, that is not for us. Or more commonly, I think we just drift away from this reality. When we drift away, when we shut the door on the Holy Spirit, we turn off the spigot of his power. We decide at some point that it is too much for us. “That is only for those weird people,” and we think we are just missing out on some optional, extracurricular Christian activity, but actually the reality

that we are seeing in this passage is that when we close the door on the Holy Spirit, we are closing the door on the presence of Jesus in our lives. When we close the door on the Spirit, we close the door on Jesus, and then we wonder why we are becalmed. The wind has not stopped. That is the good news today. The power of the Holy Spirit is still doing what the power of the Holy Spirit wants to do. The question is, have we shut the door? Have we lowered our sails?

“Okay, Josh. Great, great story. You got us fired up, maybe. You got us thinking about some stuff, but what does it actually look like for normal Christians to participate in this? We know what it looked like for Jesus, but Jesus was Jesus. What does it look like for you and me, Littleton suburban folks? What does it look like?” Well, I am glad you asked. Let’s look at a story out of Acts 10. This is going to be a great, great story. I love this story. Our story is found today in Acts 10, and it starts with a man named Cornelius. I love this name. Everybody remember? Anybody remember Yukon Cornelius from Rudolph? Remember that? That guy was crazy, that big red beard. I love that guy. Our Cornelius is different than that Cornelius. Our Cornelius was a Roman centurion. That means he led a group of people in the Roman military effort, middle management material. He was not in charge of the whole regiment. He was in charge of a specific, smaller group of people, a hundred men, middle management, a cog in the machine of this massive empire. This is found in Acts 10. He lives in this beautiful city on the coast called Caesarea Maritima. It sits on the coast. It is a beautiful harbor, and we are told that somewhere along the way in his life, he became a God-fearer. What that means is that somewhere along the way he encountered the God of Israel, and something inside of him woke up. He now prays regularly, and he is giving generously, but he is caught. He is a man caught between two worlds, between the Roman Empire world that at times is persecuting this God and his followers, and he is caught between it and a Jewish world that does not let any Gentiles, let alone Roman ones, into their world. They do not even eat with them. He has been caught between two worlds. Cornelius is spiritually homeless, and one day in the afternoon, he is praying. He is seeking the Lord. I do not know what he is asking Him about, and we can make some assumptions here, when an angel appears to him. An angel shows up, and he says, “Cornelius, your prayers have been heard. Send for Peter.” So, Cornelius stands up from that and sends his men to go find this Peter.

Thirty miles south of this town, in a city called Joppa, we find Peter. Peter, we know Peter. Peter is an ordinary fisherman. He is just a guy, but a few years ago, about three years ago, Jesus found him, called him, and changed his life forever. He took him from fishing for fish and made him a fisher of men. He is now a Jewish Christian apostle. Upon this rock, Jesus is building his church, and here we find Peter. He is on a rooftop waiting for lunch. I love this image of Peter just having spiritual experiences because he is hungry. I am like that sometimes, and he is on this rooftop when it says that he falls into some sort of mystical trance. We do not really know what this is. We do not really know what it looks like, but some sort of space where he receives a vision, and in this vision, remember he is very hungry, he sees a sheet, a tablecloth descending from heaven filled with all kinds of different food, all kinds of different animals, but they are all animals that are non-kosher. He is not allowed to eat them. All the things that they are dietarily restricted from eating are on this tablecloth presented to him. I am talking about bacon-wrapped shrimp is what is going on, on this tablecloth, and he hears a voice in the vision. He hears a voice saying, “Peter, stand up, arise, and eat this food.” Peter’s response, he is a good Jewish kosher man and says, “Certainly not, surely not, Lord,” and the voice says, “Do not call unclean what I have called clean.”

This happens three times in the vision, this happens, when all of a sudden, there is a knock on his door, and he goes down, and Peter finds Cornelius's men. I do not know who this is. They might have been servants, they might have been soldiers, but he finds these men, and he hears the Holy Spirit leading him to go, and he goes with these men. He goes back to Caesarea Maritima, where Cornelius is waiting. In the meantime, Cornelius has gathered all of his friends and his family. He is an important dude. He has got guys. He has got servants. He has got extended family. He brings them all together, and they are all excited to hear what this Jewish Christian apostle is going to say, and they welcome him in, and they sit down to listen to what he has to say. Peter, being a good apostle, preaches, and he preaches the same message that he always preaches, which is the gospel story of Jesus. He preaches it in very simple ways. You can see sermons like this one from Peter throughout the book of Acts. He says Jesus was the Son of God, who came to Earth. He lived this life. He died this death, and on the third day, He rose again, and before Peter could even get to the altar call part of his sermon, in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit descends. The Holy Spirit moves in power, sweeps through this living room very much like on the day of Pentecost, sweeps through in power and in might. It is unmistakably the work of the Holy Spirit moving through the house of this Roman centurion. Peter brought some of his buddies, and Peter just looks at his buddies and goes, "Well, I guess this is happening. Let's baptize these guys," and Peter and his friends baptized this whole Gentile family into the kingdom of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, let's stop here. What did we just see? Here is what we just saw happening in this living room. We saw what some people call the Gentile Pentecost. What we see in this story is one of the most significant moments in human history. This is the moment that the gospel of Jesus Christ breaks out of being for one family, one ethnicity, and one race, the Jews. This moment right here in this house is why you and I, Gentile believers, can be in this room together. This is an amazing, unusual breaking out of the kingdom of God that no one saw coming, not Peter, not the rest of the Jewish believers. They thought this life with God was an insider thing, and all of a sudden, the power of the Holy Spirit broke the gospel out of its boundaries. Thanks be to God that the gospel is for me and for you, but let's look. I think that is important. Thanks be to God for the Gentile Pentecost, but let's look for just a second at who and how, whom God used and how He made this great moment of the kingdom advancing on Earth happen.

Let's go back to Cornelius for just a second. Remember I said Cornelius is a man caught between two worlds, caught between a Roman world and a Jewish world, neither really liking him. Notice he is praying, and he is praying in private and, he is not doing that at work, but he is hungry for something. You can see this. You can see the angel answering his prayers. He is hungry for something more and something real. He is praying, but he is not sure anyone is listening until this moment. I think a lot of us in this room know exactly what that feels like. A lot of us in this room are not as comfortable in church as we may think we ought to be. A lot of us feel caught between a culture and a world that says one thing, that does not believe in all of this stuff, but something in us is still pulling us and dragging us at times towards this faith, this gospel, this Jesus thing. Then there are people in this room who are way more comfortable, I do not know, in a garage or in a conference room or maybe a back yard, maybe some sort of auto shop. I do not know. There are people who are way more comfortable anywhere else than in this room right now. Church may have always felt really foreign to you. The vocabulary is weird, right? Maybe the singing is strange. Maybe everybody else seems like they have it all together. "Heck, I saw a guy out there with a

sweater vest on, for goodness' sake.” It seems like the last place that you would be comfortable is here in church, yet here you are. This is what Cornelius was experiencing, and like Cornelius, the Holy Spirit is saying to you today, “I see you, and I am sending someone towards you.”

The other thing that is important for all of us to remember, whether we feel like Cornelius or not, is that there are Corneliuses everywhere in our world. There are people walking around this world caught, caught between a society that tells them that they are only what they produce, that they are only what they consume, that this life is, all that is here is to have a good time and live a good life, and that is about it, and something in them says that that can't possibly be true, and they are hungry for lives of meaning and purpose. This is the coworker who is confused. Maybe they are skeptical, but they are interested. They are curious. This is that young couple, maybe in your family, or maybe friends of your kids, that young couple who are about to get married, and they are asking big questions about their life, about the family they want to build, and about who they want to be as humans. This is that neighbor down the street who is really comfortable in his garage, but he is starving for someone to engage him and invite him and welcome him into relationship, into a life of purpose. There are Corneliuses everywhere. There are so many people in this world who are so hungry to be let in, and the Spirit is moving toward them. The question is not whether or not the Spirit is moving. The Holy Spirit is always moving towards those people. The question is whether or not Peter will show up.

Let's look at Peter. Peter is not on the outside looking in, right? Peter is fully in. Peter is the guy wearing the sweater vest. He is the guy that had his kids signed up for VBS the hour it opened, right? He is a good churchgoing guy. He is building the church. He is on the inside, but he is stuck too. He is just stuck on the inside. Peter is stuck in a world where his own comfort and his own beliefs around who can come and who can go, who is allowed in, he is stuck there. He is stuck in his own comfort and assumptions about how this Christianity thing works.

I think a lot of us in this room are like Peter. I think I might be. We have been doing this for a long time. We know the rules. We are showing up. We do the right things. We serve at the right time. We follow all of the expectations. We ask others to do the same. We give generously. We give regularly, but this morning the Spirit is knocking. The Spirit is knocking on the door of our hearts, asking if we would be willing to go outside of our comfort zone. The Spirit is wanting to understand if we would be the kind of people who are willing to move past some of our assumptions and move out towards other people for the sake of the gospel. This is Peter, and a lot of us, like Peter, are saying no to the Spirit. Maybe that directly. Maybe we say the Holy Spirit life is not for us. We are smarter than that. We understand that. This is who we are. Some of us are like that. Some others of us may not be like that. Maybe we still want the Spirit. We say we do. We want the power of the Spirit in our lives. We want goosebumps in worship, or we want to feel clarity and direction in prayer. We want to go into the mountains and experience his presence for our lives, but one of the tricks is if that is all we want, the power of the Holy Spirit for our personal spiritual experiences, we miss the direction of the Holy Spirit entirely, and we get left behind. The direction of the power of the Spirit always moves us up and out towards other people, and when we keep asking the Spirit to bring us more things rather than lead us towards other people, we are going to get left behind. We are going to end up becalmed and stuck.

We have a couple of more stories here as we wrap up. As this story wraps up, Peter eventually has to return to Jerusalem. He goes to Joppa first and goes back to Jerusalem, and he has to provide a bit of an account. You can imagine that this story stirred up some trouble in his life, in the Jewish establishment. “Who are you to baptize all these Roman Gentiles?” and here is what he says in Acts 11. He is explaining this situation to his fellow Jewish leaders. He tells them this whole story, and here is what Peter says to them: “So if God gave them,” the Gentiles, “the same gift,” the gift of the Holy Spirit, “that He gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” “Who was I to think I could stand in God’s way?” This is a hard message, and I do not feel completely equipped to bring it, but who are we to stand in God’s way? Who are we to say who is in and who is out, whom the Lord can save and whom He can’t? Who are we to say who is welcome here and who is not? Who are we to say that that many tattoos are too many tattoos? Who are we to stand in the way of what the Holy Spirit is doing? May we be a different kind of church.

So, what is it going to take? What is it going to take for us to experience the power of God moving through here? The other day I was, it is baseball season, right? It is baseball season. The other day I was helping coach my son Eli’s game. He is seven. They are pretty good. They are not great. They are seven-year-olds, and right in the middle of the game, actually in the middle of a pitch, the pitch was coming, and the first baseman, not my son, but he was right there. I was in the dugout, and the first baseman walked off the field. Ready position and just stands up and walks off, walks off the field, and he comes into the dugout, and I said, “What in the world are you doing?” He goes, “Oh, I can’t see. It is too hot,” and I looked at him with a little bit of incredulity, and I said, “Get back in the game.”

I wonder if the Holy Spirit might be saying to a lot of us that we need to get back in the game. I wonder if somewhere along the way we said it is too hot, we do not want to play anymore, it is too hard, we do not want to risk that kind of Christian life, and we walked off the field. I wonder if the Holy Spirit is saying to us today, “Get back in the game,” and do you know what it is going to take to get back in the game? It is going to take risk. We, Waterstone Church, are going to have to risk feeling foolish. We are going to have to risk our neighbors knowing that we are Christians. We are going to have to risk it being awkward. Can you imagine how awkward it was for Peter to walk into a Roman soldier’s house? We are going to have to risk getting it wrong. We are going to make mistakes along the way. That is why it is called practicing. These are spiritual practices, us listening and discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit as He works in our lives. We are going to have to risk something for the Holy Spirit to move, for the gospel to advance, and this is what I want.

I want to be in the game. I want so badly to be right in the middle of what the Holy Spirit is doing. I want to see Him bringing more people to faith. I want to see Him saving the millennial generation. I want to see Him moving through the zip codes of Littleton, of Ken Caryl, of Evergreen. I want to see Him drawing people in. I want to see Him giving people families. I want to see Him healing people of their anxiety and their addictions. I want to be in the game. I want to see Him move in Generation Alpha and Generation Y. I want to see Him bring young men back to faith. I want to be in the game, and I hope you do too. If we are willing, Waterstone, if we are willing to step up and risk something, I think the Holy Spirit will do it.

Our story ends with these two guys, one Roman soldier, one Jewish apostle, eating together. This is the power of the gospel, bringing enemies together at the table, and this is the same table we get to come to today. We do not come to the table needing to prove anything. We do not come to the table trying to show off. We come to the table today as ordinary people saved by the goodness and grace of Jesus. So, this morning I invite you to come as ordinary people, saved by the power of the Holy Spirit. John 14, Jesus says this: “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” We need to ask. We need to ask. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to move here.

I want to do one more thing before we leave today. If you are someone who feels strange in this room, but you got drawn here, but this morning you feel the Holy Spirit pounding in your chest, do not leave here without responding to that. That is His invitation to you. Come talk to us. We are putting prayer ministers around the room. They are wearing red lanyards. We would all love to talk to you. We would love to pray with you.

For the rest of us, I want to take just a second, and I want to ask that the Holy Spirit would show us whom He is calling us to. So, if you would, just close your eyes and open your hands, and Holy Spirit, at this moment right here, we ask that you would call us and send us to our neighbors, our loved ones, strangers, co-workers. Right now, I ask that you would give all of us with our hands open, a face or a name. Remind us of a story. Remind us of someone right now. Give us an image or a name. Draw us towards that person. We wait, so Lord, we ask for every one of those names and faces that you just deposited in our hearts. I pray for obedience, and I pray for every one of those people, that they would come to know you by the power of your Holy Spirit.

38:48 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

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