

Numbers 11:24-30, Acts 2:1-21
“Where have all the prophets gone?”

Pentecost Sunday is a celebration of the birthday of the church where we uplift the presence of the Holy Spirit as the guiding light and the guiding force in all that we do. The way in which we make decisions is not centered around a single person, like me, the pastor. But by a group of people, each of whom we believe God speaks to directly with the same power and conviction as God would speak to me your pastor.

We are currently undergoing a nationwide search for a youth director, and it tends to be within those types of searches where the Holy Spirit is able to move us to goose bumps because it becomes obvious who is being called. Some have wondered why go through the search process when we already have a keeper in Brett, someone who is growing our youth in their personal relationship to Jesus and also growing the group in number.

The reason why we opened it up to a search is found in two words that are so important to us today: Holy Spirit. The candidates we are interviewing come from all types of backgrounds. We are interviewing an Asian American man, an African American woman, a handful of Anglo males. We truly believe that as Presbyterian, God is more than able, in fact God chooses to work in a process where people gathered can prayerfully discern the leading of the Holy Spirit and share that with the group. So each member of that committee is leaned on and we trust that they are going to God in prayer for discernment and understanding.

We had one candidate who just finished his Master's of Divinity and wanted to enter the position so that he could be ordained to it. He didn't know and we had to take a refresher course on Presbyterian government as we recognized that the Presbyterian Church probably has the most stringent prerequisites, for ordination, except for that whole celibate thing in the Roman Catholic Church. He would have had to take a year of school in a Presbyterian School to learn our form of government, then he would need to pass 4 ordination exams, and then a whole other committee would need to be formed by the congregation in order to search the nation, again, and then he could have been called.

At times I wonder if we confine the Holy Spirit to certain boxes where we in fact quench the Spirit as Paul tells us not to. We set up our own parameters and only through certain people that we choose can a person be chosen. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, and that means that all people should have a personal relationship with Jesus and that relationship makes each person as significant as the other in interpreting and living out Scripture. But do we believe

in the prophethood of all believers? Meaning do we believe that every single person has the Holy Spirit and is able to speak with the same powerful voice as the next person as to whom God is moving and how God is acting. Our committees are set up so that every person has a voice should they choose to use it.

Today we find in our Scriptures Moses who wishes that every single one of his people would be prophets and Acts, our Pentecost Scripture, describes how every single disciple gathered in that room, each and every one of them, was blessed with the Holy Spirit and that all became prophets who received it.

We ask that as the 21st century church are we open and aware of God's Spirit moving among us and speaking to us clearly or is that just for the Pastor, some of the more influential and loudest members of this church. Or do we all have the public square to voice how we believe that the Holy Spirit is moving. Let's read.

READ

For the past three years I have preached on this Acts Scripture because it is the classic Pentecost Scripture where we are able to see how the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost in a way that empowered them to speak other languages proclaiming the glory of God. The gift of the Holy Spirit was God's unmatched present to us the church and a gift that we have treasured and valued since it was given to us. Acts 2 is not a foreign Scripture to us. We will read it every year on the day of Pentecost.

But this year I discovered some verses that were much less familiar to me but so parallel and perfectly appropriate for Pentecost. Let's go ahead and try to understand what is taking place in our Numbers Scripture. These verses are written in the midst of a rebellion. Sure Moses had led them out of Egypt, God had given them quail at one point in their journey, but now it was manna, and only manna. Day in and day out and the people were getting tired. When I went to college my parents left the country and for 5 years during the summer starting from when I was 17 I had my own apartment and worked a couple three jobs. Every single day for lunch for these 5 summers I had peanut butter and jelly. I loved it, it is still my lunch of choice if there are no leftovers.

But for 40 years manna was getting old, the people complained, and Moses realized he needed help to govern them. They were getting out of hand and he just wasn't able to do it on his own. God told him to call 70 people representing the tribes of Israel so that he could equip

them to help Moses in leading the people. 70, the same number of people Jesus chose in Luke 10 to go out and heal and teach and lead people to the Kingdom of God. Also the same number in the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish Supreme Court in Jesus' day.

God met them in the tabernacle, or in the tent of meeting which was the traveling Temple of that wandering Israelites. He took, the Scripture tells us, some of the Holy Spirit from Moses and doled it out to those present. As soon as they received this presence of God they began, the Scripture tells us, to prophecy. What does prophecy mean? I'm going to use the New Testament definition that we find in Acts 2:11 "we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." The parallel to the day of Pentecost is striking, up to this point.

But 2 of these 70 were not able to make it into the tabernacle, maybe they were in the restroom, or didn't feel well enough to leave the camp with everyone else and go into the tent outside of the camp where Moses and God had been hanging out for days. We don't know, but what we do know is that those two then began to prophecy in the camp, away from the other 70, outside of the institutional framework of the tabernacle and away from the watchful eye of Moses. Those who saw it are rightfully alarmed because what if this powerful message ended up in the wrong hands?

So Joshua, Moses' favorite. We don't know it yet but he is the heir apparent who will be leading the Israelites into the promised land. Scripture says he belonged to Moses, he protests to Moses and tells him to stop them from prophesizing outside of the confines of the others and outside of the tabernacle. Don't allow them to go any further. Stop them! Moses responds, don't worry about me, it isn't about me. These aren't Moses' people, this isn't Moses' church, these aren't Moses' programs or ideas. And he says: "How I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets." Almost with a tear in his eye, I can see and hear him say, I wish everyone would take the initiative to proclaim the glory of the Lord outside of the tent and in the church without anyone telling them and to stop.

You see Moses welcomes the help of the 70, but he also sought to share his authority and receive wisdom from people of spirit among those outside the institutional leadership of God's people. The Spirit of God was moving and could not be confined to the tent. In fact it spreads to those in the camp and then in verse 31 we read that this same wind, the Spirit, stirs up some quail to fall in the camp.

John 3:8 tells us that the Spirit blows where it chooses. It moves to warm our hearts spiritually as well as pragmatically provides when we are in need. The parallel of this Scripture to Acts is evident. Peter and the disciples are gathered in a single room, like a tent. All who are gathered there, vs. 4 tells us, were filled with the Holy Spirit as were those 70. The result of the Holy Spirit, like in Numbers, was to prophecy here by speaking in many languages of the glory of God so that all those gathered in Jerusalem for the festival day would be able to understand.

Peter, like Moses, explains the purpose of this pouring out. It is not so that as an institution we are in control of who speaks of the glory of God. No, he quotes from the prophet, yes, the one who prophecies, the prophet Joel who tells us that when the Holy Spirit is poured out our sons and our daughters will prophecy. Even those in the lowest social class, back then the slaves, both men and women will prophecy. It happened and came true on the day of Pentecost.

God places no limitations on who can be His prophet, his spokesperson. But we try, don't we? My daughter turns 18 today, she's old enough to vote. To be honest, that is probably scarier to me than her being able to drive. She is able to contribute to and decide who will govern this country, who will govern this borough. She gets one vote, I get one vote. I'm not so sure how I feel about that.

We try to limit how God can talk in the church in the same way. If a person isn't from an established family their voice may not carry the same weight as another. Or the one who speaks the loudest and is the most forceful will probably sway the decision. Or if I weigh in on a discussion it is likely to have a different impact than if a new member were to say something similar.

I remember being in a meeting early on in my ministry here and stressing how important it was for us to reach out to those who are new among us, and also those within the community who may not know anything about us and how we must become more like them rather than expect them to become more like us. The objection was raised, but we can't completely let them walk all over us and have anything they want. They have to learn what it means to be one of us.

Where have all the prophets gone? Moses wanted the entire body of Israelites to move away from their focus on what their needs appeared to be, the daily manna that seemed monotonous just wasn't enough anymore. He wanted them to move away from a false sense of

comfort that they were sure they deserved and move toward a people of prophecy that not only allowed but yearned for a voice outside of the box.

Peter foretold that this would happen. People we least expect will rise up and be prophets. It's not going to be the same people of this church that you are used to hearing. The prophets are here, among us, they just haven't found their voice yet. This voice which is geared to glorifying God, but they will. Allow the Holy Spirit to move in such a way that God will speak to us even through those outside of the tent, in the camp, who normally aren't listened to. Where have all the prophets gone? They are right here, if we would just listen to them. Amen.