

Sermon Text for May 28, 2023 - Pentecost Sunday

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Numbers 11:24-30, Acts 2:1-13

“A little bit of Spirit goes a long way”

On Tuesday I attended a Presbytery meeting with three of our elders. For those of you who are unfamiliar with what a Presbytery meeting is, we belong as First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg in the Donegal Presbytery which is composed of 49 churches that stretch from York, Lancaster, and Chester Counties and one church in Maryland. We had a speaker who asked us a simple question, when was the last time that you had a spiritual experience. Let me ask you that question, when was the last time that you had a spiritual experience? Now, we may all define spiritual in a different way, but the root of the word is Spirit and I would define it as an experience where you knew that the Holy Spirit, God was present in your midst?

I could identify two at the meeting, during the baptisms in the service I am often moved and I can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit alighting upon the heads of those being baptized, most recently Wyatt and Ryder and sweet Caroline. In the second service while we were singing the song Gratitude, I felt the spirit move. I want to add one more, at session meeting, I know, sounds crazy and very counter intuitive, I asked session to join me in what is called lectio divino where I read a Scripture and each person chose a word or a phrase that struck them. It was really moving to meet as a session and do that type of spiritual work together, as opposed to just making decisions.

So when was the last time that you had a spiritual experience? Both of our Scriptures this morning clearly reflect a spiritual experience where beyond a shadow of a doubt God was present and God was present specifically in the Holy Spirit being present and gifting the people of God in speaking powerfully, some to prophesy and others in other languages to proclaim God's great deeds of power. Both of these experiences that we read about can only be described as spiritual, spirit filled experiences.

So the presence and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each one of us is part of who we are as Christians. But sometimes as we sit in the pews set up a hierarchy or tiers of spirituality where there is a bit of a caste system within the church. The pastors are seen as the most spiritual, God help us all, and then there are those who we view as spiritual, Sunday School teachers, spiritual directors like Carole Turano, and then down the line and my guess is that many of you would place yourselves on the bottom of that totem pole. But no, that is not the

way God works and that is not a reflection of the truth. The Holy Spirit has been poured out equally on all of us. Every single person here has the opportunity to receive and to use the Holy Spirit equally. Let's read what that means.

READ

The Numbers Scripture may not be a super familiar Scripture, but it is perfectly suited for Pentecost, the day that we celebrate the presence and the gift of the Holy Spirit which many people call the birthing of the church. Look at vs.25 in our Numbers Scripture and we read: ...God takes some of the Holy Spirit that had been placed on Moses and then distributes it to the leaders of the church. That was the first step in the distribution of God's Spirit and that it was first given to Moses, then the leaders of the Israelite community. As a result of them being filled with the Holy Spirit they were able to perform God's work, in this case prophesying about God's work.

The story goes here that two of them were not able to make it to where the other 70 were, but they were on the list to receive the Spirit, and they received it, and they began speaking of God's mighty deeds in the camp. Joshua, who is going to take over for Moses down the line, much like Peter comes to Moses and says to him, do something because the more they proclaim God's mighty acts outside of the parameters that we have established them to do it, then the less credit you are going to get for being an instrument of God. Do something Moses because they are your competition.

Moses tells Joshua, look at vs.29, how I wish that all of the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit in them. They are not our competition, they are instruments of God. You know me well enough by now to understand the way I view the churches in Strasburg. We pray for the churches and the pastors on a regular basis in our worship services. Some might think other churches are our competition. I tell people the only competition we have is Satan, he is the only one who tries to take our people away from God and toward something else.

We have some strong churches here in Strasburg, and over the years we have seen some of our members join Strasburg Mennonite or Acts Covenant church and I hope you understand that this is not a loss for the kingdom. We may feel it as a loss, but ultimately in the big picture, it is not a loss for the kingdom because we believe that the Spirit of God rests mightily upon all of the churches of Strasburg. None of these churches are our competition, we are co-workers in the same field. Moses' statement in vs.29 should be our statement.

You see on this Pentecost Sunday we can say that not only did the Holy Spirit descend on Moses, and then on the leaders of the church, but as we look at our Acts Scripture, the Old Testament foreshadows a time when the Holy Spirit will cast a much wider net. Read Joel 2:28-29..." I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. This takes us to the day of Pentecost when God did just that, when he poured out his Spirit on all flesh.

Let's turn to Acts and specifically on vs.4 and we see this theme repeated. "And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." Each of the disciples who were gathered, and there were probably about 120 of them, received the Holy Spirit and we read that it was for the primary purpose of, look at vs.11, to speak of God's amazing deeds of power. The tongues of flame and the rushing wind got the people's attention and made them realize that this is definitely something unique that is taking place and by the end they could without a doubt label it as a spiritual experience, an experience where the Spirit of God was obviously at work.

When we read that they all received the Holy Spirit it reminds us of those both within and outside of the camp in Numbers who received it, it reminds us that the Holy Spirit was promised to be poured out on all flesh, both on our daughters and on our sons. This is why we baptize, we pray for the Holy Spirit to be present and descend upon those that we baptize and we believe that it actually takes place. It isn't me doing it, it is God doing it, which is why baptisms tend to be so emotional for me. Here is a person who is entering the kingdom of God and God has deigned that we would all be witnesses to it.

It also means that there are not political or geographic limitations to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God has chosen to send it upon the Chinese and the Russians and the Iranians. This concept tears apart our building up of walls that first of all creates a meritocracy for those who deserve to receive the Holy Spirit and those who do not. As I mentioned earlier if anyone here sitting in these pews thinks they do not deserve to have the Holy Spirit and so certainly have been skipped by God in that camp, it simply is not true.

We believe in something called the priesthood of all believers that says specifically that there are not special people in the church who have special powers to do special things. This concept means that all people have direct access to Christ and there is no need for any individual to open the door for us to access Christ. As a result, we all have access and have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, equally. But many times we tend to put ourselves last or think to ourselves that we don't deserve to be with these people, they are so spiritual. Look around the room, really, do you really think so?

So what does this mean to us on this Pentecost Sunday? It can be very confusing. It was to Joshua who felt like the Holy Spirit was only for those who were naturally Holy and set apart to be Holy. Even at Pentecost we read in vs.12 people asking the questions what does this mean? What just happened. We read earlier twice that the people were bewildered, amazed, astonished. What just happened. The presence of the Holy Spirit which leads to people speaking about God's mighty acts isn't as self-explanatory as we would like it to be.

The same thing happens when Jesus first preaches. In Luke 4 we see Jesus return to his hometown and his home church and he preaches and the people go from pleasure to wrath as they look to drive him out and kill him for what he said. When the Holy Spirit fills you it isn't always well received and it can be confusing and bewildering. You see if we truly believe that the Holy Spirit is poured out on all of us it can produce both joy and a sense of danger. Are there no barriers to it, are there no checks and balances?

So Luke takes us today to a place where the Holy Spirit is poured out on all of us. How does that make you feel? If it is new to you and you are bewildered and confused can I ask you to do something for me. It is a personal request because I want to see this church filled with people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. If you don't know what that means for you personally, won't you join us on June 10 at 10am for being in the presence. If are having a hard time identifying when the last time was that you had a spiritual experience, come and join us on June 10. Then join us on Jun 11 at the Hess pond and consider giving your life over to Christ. If for the first time and if not then rededicate it to Christ. God wants to work powerfully in your life through the Holy Spirit. Let him do it. Amen.