

The Holy Spirit Connects and Gives Us Wisdom
Sermon Text, Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 2023

Happy day of Pentecost! You all look great wearing red, and orange and white. What a great celebration day.

We are living in the season of Pentecost; the season of the Spirit; it starts today. We will be in this season until All Saints Sunday in November. We have all this summer and part of the fall to unpack and to talk about the season of Pentecost and what it all means. To kick it off I wanted to share a couple things about the Holy Spirit, about Pentecost, and about the Church. I'm going to attempt to wrap them all up together.

Our first lesson came to us from The Book of Numbers – the fourth book of the Bible. Numbers is one of the least talked about books. Today's reading is an alternate reading that shows up once every three years. So, if you've never heard of Eldad and Medad, that's all right. I asked for this alternate reading to be put in today because it is the beginning of what we understand of the Holy Spirit. But, in Moses's day, it appears they already knew about the Spirit. I'm telling you this because in the 20th century there were anti-Jewish people that said what happened on the day of Pentecost was strictly Christian; like it was the first time in history it ever happened and it only happens to those who believe in a very strict or narrow version of who we think Jesus is. The Book of Numbers, however, tells us that interacting with the Holy Spirit is an ancient practice.

If anybody here has ever been involved in management; if you've ever been involved in education; you will like this story. Moses was trying to do it all. He was trying to teach, he was trying to adjudicate, he was trying to lead and to manage. He was collapsing under the weight of the power that he had. Some close friends spoke to Moses. They told him to raised up 70 people to assist him. He did and brought them off to a place by themselves. They became the leadership group; he was the leader of them all; he had 70 people with him. This is what has been handed to Moses – this was a tradition, a practice, a standard of leadership back in Moses's day. He was taking what had already been handed to him he brought them out. When they all were gathered together, the Spirit of the Lord came upon them and they prophesied.

Scholars do not agree on what prophesying means. All theologians believe that prophesying has something to do with speech; it has something to do with words that we say; it has something to do with leadership; it has something to do with education or pedagogy; it has something to do with how we interact with each other; prophesying is about how we learn and how we know. That is what theologians agree on. But what it actually means; well, there are four different things prophesying can mean.

The first one: that you are God's spokesperson. Prophesying can mean that you are speaking for God.

The second one: you're saying what God has spoken to you. An aspect of this is predicting the future. Like, “On this day the world will end.”

The third one: making authoritative statements. This is what they said of Jesus – he speaks with authority. Having authority – prophesying – is saying I know God, I know the Bible, I know that this is the way forward.

The fourth form scares some Christians within the liturgical tradition. It is prophetic utterances. Speaking in tongues; or people shouting out things – that's the fourth type.

So when the 70 elders had the Spirit upon them and they were “prophesying” they were either being God's spokesperson, or they were making predictions, or they were speaking with authority or they're speaking spontaneously. We don't know which one it was.

The story goes on: two men remained in the camp. They were not a part of the 70. Eldad and Medad; and the Spirit rested on them too. They were prophesying in the camp. Joshua, who's the number two in charge, he is the Chief Operating Officer if you will, he ran to Moses and said, “Moses, my Lord, stop them!” Moses said, “Are you jealous for my sake? What if all the Lord's people did this! Wouldn't it be nice if everybody could do this!?”

We know that as the Bible has more stories about the Spirit. The prophet Joel was quoted by Peter in our Acts reading – “My Spirit will rest upon all people; on men and women; on servants; and anybody who cries out in the Name of The Lord will be saved.”

Was he speaking as God's spokesperson; what it a prediction; is it Authority; or is it spontaneous utterance. It sounds like it was all four.

What happened with the 70 leaders with Moses, and with Eldad and Medad, was rather unique but it wasn't the first time in history that it happened. Gathering people together to form leadership groups, to form teaching groups, this is something that has been evolving and moving.

So what does this mean to us in our day?

The Spirit, known as ruach in Hebrew; ruach means both spirit and breath and wind. Ruach can be all of those things – it is the Spirit that blows through us; it is the thing that gives us life, that fills our lungs. Its companion Greek – the Old Testament is written both in Hebrew and in Greek – the companion word in Greek is Pneuma. Pneuma has all of those meanings – spirit, breath, wind – it also means a few other things: it means alcohol, like spirits; it means school spirit; it means ghost – like a spirit – it has all of those meanings. Anytime you hear the word Spirit written in the Old Testament or in the New Testament it can be translated as wind; it can be translated as breath; it can be translated as Spirit.

You may have heard the term Hagia Sophia. Sophia is the word for wisdom; Hagia means holy. Hagia Sophia is wisdom that blows through us. We are in that season. The Holy Wisdom is upon all of God's people; male and female; slave and free; it's upon all of God's people.

Let's focus on two aspects of the Spirit – wisdom and connectivity.

You've heard of Plato... not the stuff that you play with and make shapes out of that looks like clay; but about the philosopher. Platonic theory is that the spirit Sophia; we would call the holy spirit; is in all students and it's the job as a teacher to ask questions and to draw the wisdom out, to draw the Sophia, to draw the spirit out of each of his or her students. Plato did this by asking questions and drawing the Spirit of knowledge and wisdom out.

The Holy Spirit is also connectivity. We are all connected in together in one Spirit. God's people are held in unity and in love and fellowship connectivity with one another. Even today in this country where we feel divided, the wisdom, the ruach, the pneuma of God is blowing through each of us and pulling us together.

I've had moments of the Holy Spirit many times in my life. I was 15 years old and a counselor in training at Camp Houston, an Episcopal Church camp that is located in the majestic North Cascades off of Highway 2 in Washington State. I was a CIT with the third and fourth graders. Our routine was to take a short hike, stop for lunch and then after lunch we have Noonday prayers we hear a small gospel lesson and then somebody gets to prophesy; somebody gets to explain with authority with wisdom what the Gospel means. ... to third and fourth graders. Is that easy to do? Anyone? Yeah, no, it is hard. So they chose me. I thought *oh good they saw something of spirit within me*. I think they just saw a sucker; yeah, let's have the CIT do it.

So there we were, on the bank of the Wallace River that features beautiful waterfalls, clay banks and football field size sections of beautiful river stones with grass was popping up between them to hold the bank in place. We're sitting out on a beautiful sunny day; rare in Washington state; but it was sunny and had lunch everybody and everyone was relaxing. The Gospel lesson was Matthew 13 the parable of the sower. You're going to hear this on July 16th so I'm going to try not to preach too much on it because you're going to hear it again. In that parable, the sower sows the seeds – some land on the path, some land on the rocky ground, some land on the thorns, and some land on fertile soil. It was my job to preach that, with five minutes, to third and fourth graders. I had a little message in mind; I stood up to speak and suddenly I had a brain fog. I couldn't think of what my message was. Here are my mentors my leaders and I want to become a counselor and I want to do well. But my brain just shut down.

There's this kid, Charlie; he needed a lot of attention. He always was doing something with his hands – throwing rocks, pulling on pony tails, climbing trees. He needed a lot of one-on-one time. He had ecstatic utterances, if you will, all the time. He was sitting on Jody's lap, she's one of our most senior counselors, he was sitting on her lap and they were doing this little hand game just to keep his hands involved while we were going to hear the gospel. So she's sitting there with Charlie in the front row and I can't think of what to say. Internally I prayed, *help me Lord I don't know what to say* and that's when Charlie stopped his hand game and raised his hand. I looked at him and he started to speak but very quietly; which is rare for him; he's the kid at two in the morning who announces he has to go to the bathroom, I mean everybody can hear it right; but he was speaking very quietly so I leaned down to hear what Charlie had to say. He said the path means this, rocky soil means this, the thorns means this, good soil means this. And nothing

else. Usually kids of that age don't tell you succinctly, but the wisdom, the connectivity that is poured out on all people was shining through Charlie that day. So I told the kids the message. And if you wonder what it means, well, show up on July 16th.

Because of Charlie, I was able to preach that story. He had wisdom beyond his years. Beyond his; I mean we have labels for people like Charlie nowadays; the spirit rested on him. And yes of course God would put it onto the youngest and most hyperactive of all of us. And he spoke God's wisdom.

Connectivity. About a year ago we had a story that we read for our discussion groups and the author was saying that she was on a subway in New York City holding on to one of the handrails minding her own business when suddenly a breath came upon her and she realized she is connected to every single person in that subway car. She felt as if her heart was extending out to each of the hearts that was on that train – young and old immigrant and American; everyone and so she wrote about it and it got published in the New York Times.

I have had that experience. Some of you have shared that experience that you have had like that as well. I was on a Bay Area Rapid Transit – Bart is what it's called – subway in the San Francisco bay area. People from all different diverse backgrounds and races and languages ride Bart. One day I'm minding my own business, I was going to Seminary, I must have maybe been in prayer or maybe not, maybe I was just hanging and suddenly I too had this breath upon my heart that connected me with everybody on that train. And I've had it more than once. More recently we were watching the Sarasota Orchestra. They were playing a chamber orchestra piece that for this trombone player it wasn't doing much to me so I decided to close my eyes and relax and just start picturing and letting this very quiet and extremely well-done piece wash over me. Slowly one by one my heart started to connect with the other people in the auditorium. I felt the connectivity like sitting on a wave that rolls and it was rolling with the breathing with the chamber music. I've never felt that before and I realized that we are all connected; we're connected and even the composer who wrote this; we are all connected in one.

A month ago, I was at Publix in flip-flops, a swimsuit that was still wet from swimming around the boat in Sarasota Bay. I was walking down the aisle, you know the aisle where on your left you have all of the cashiers and on the right you have the coffee and then the frozen foods. I was there and whammo it happened again. The Spirit came upon me and I felt that everybody in that Publix is connected. There is a spirit that connects all of our hearts together. I didn't ask for it, I wasn't praying, I wasn't bored, it just came upon me like it did for that author who wrote about her story in the New York subway.

We celebrate the Holy Spirit today and we're wearing red because of flames that Peter and the rest experienced. That spirit connects us to one another for as much as we think we're divided the Holy Spirit sees us as one for as much as we see through the lens of young or old, able or disabled, Hagia Sophia the wisdom of God, the holy wisdom blows through all of us making us all connected and one. It connects us with Moses, it connects us with Eldad it connects us with

Medad, it connects us with everyone. This is the Spirit that the Church was built upon and so we celebrate today. We celebrate because we are one. We celebrate that we have a God who enlightens in all of us a spirit of unity, a spirit of wisdom, and a spirit of connectivity. We're going to continue to celebrate this through the rest of the summer and for the rest of our Church year remembering that we are loved and that God's spirit is poured out upon all and that the wisdom of God is that we are all connected.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.