

“The Power of the Unseen”

Joel 2:28-29

May 19, 2013

The Day of Pentecost

Read Text

The following notice was spotted in the lost and found section of a newspaper: “Lost Dog. \$50 reward. Black-and-tan dog of poodle and German shepherd descent. Flea-bitten, left hind leg missing, and blind. Answers to the name *Lucky*.” Although this poor dog was called Lucky, he sure didn’t appear to be “lucky” and I doubt that he felt lucky.

We may feel the same way in our spiritual lives as well. Although we are supposed to be “lucky” or, more properly “blessed”, we often don’t appear to be blessed or feel blessed. We have the effects of sin on the world - terrorism, crime, violent weather, illness, and the general inhumanity of much of humanity - buffeting us on the outside. We have the effects of sin on our conscience - temptation, guilt, depression - buffeting us from within.

While desiring solutions to those problems, we also may desire a spiritual experience to help us cope with these issues and to reconnect us to God and all that is good. We desire the Spirit of the Living God to live within us and to flow through us that we might have the abundant life which God wants us to have.

Yet having the Spirit of God within one’s self has often been seen as being limited to someone more deserving or more spiritual. In ancient Israel, that was the case. God chose Israel as a nation to fill with His Spirit so that they might be a light to the other nations through which they could find their way back to God. God sent His Spirit to priests and prophets so that they might speak His message to the people. That’s all well and good.

However, although God chose Israel purely out of grace, they began to get the idea that they were somehow worthy of having the Spirit of God among them. They began to believe that the Spirit of God was to be limited to them as a nation. The Spirit of God would certainly dwell within their

priests and prophets. He might also be limited to filling worthy individuals - a certain class of people, the wealthy; a certain gender of people, males; and a certain age of people, mature adults.

But times would change. The prophet, Joel, wrote about those changing times in our text for today when he prophesied, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

Pentecost, the day we celebrate today, was the fulfillment of that prophesy -- the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was poured out by God in a very visible way upon the eleven apostles. There was the sound like the blowing of a violent wind. There were tongues of fire which rested on each of them.

The results were more important than the visible signs which accompanied them. The apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit prophesied, that is, they spoke of the wonders of God. Despite the fact that there were many different people from many different countries who spoke many different languages, all of them were able to understand. While people were wondering what this was all about, Peter stood up and said exactly what it was all about. The Holy Spirit had been poured out by God in fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

What does this have to do with us today though? I'm sure we would like to have an experience like that Pentecost with the Holy Spirit being poured out so lavishly. Yet we tend to think such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and all the blessings that come with it is either limited to a former Biblical time when those sorts of things would happen or limited to certain groups or individuals who are more worthy or spiritual than us.

We may think the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is limited to a single nation like Israel did. Many people tend to believe that America is God's chosen nation these days. We may think the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is limited to the clergy who are much more spiritual, especially to TV evangelists who claim the anointing of the Holy Spirit in their preaching and so-called miracles. We may think the

outpouring is limited to a certain social class -- upper middle class white Americans -- or a single gender. There continues to be much confusion and turmoil over the roles of men and women in the church. We may think the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is limited to a certain age group -- those who have been confirmed or turned 21. How often have we spoken of the youth of our congregation as the "church of the future"? Does that imply they are not the church now?

We may think all these things, but we would be wrong. God still pours out His Holy Spirit now in our day. "But," you may say, "I don't hear the sound like the blowing of a violent wind. I never have. I don't see tongues of fire resting on the heads of people in this church. I never have." And you are right. But that doesn't mean the Holy Spirit isn't poured out. He is. God pours out His Holy Spirit just as abundantly and just as surely as He did on that day of Pentecost, but in an unseen way. God began doing that on the very day of Pentecost.

If we were to read the rest of Peter's sermon in Acts 2, we would come to the conclusion where Peter's hearers were so moved by his Holy Spirit-inspired message that they asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter did not reply, "Go back into the upper room where we were. Listen for the sound of a violent wind. Look for tongues of fire upon your heads. And you shall receive the Holy Spirit." Instead, Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The One who had been poured out earlier that day in a very visible way would now be poured out in an invisible way. Nevertheless, the power of the unseen would be as powerful as if He had been seen. Scripture records that "about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Joel's prophesy, fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, is still being fulfilled this very day. God is abundantly pouring out His Holy Spirit, but it is not on a single nation or ethnic group or clergy group. He is pouring out His Spirit on all people. He is not pouring out His Spirit upon a single social class, but on everyone from the richest to the poorest; from the CEO's to the working class; from the rulers to the servants. God is not pouring out His on a single gender but upon men and women alike. God

is not pouring out His Spirit upon a single age group but upon young and old alike. God has poured and is pouring out His Holy Spirit upon you here. God is pouring out His Spirit upon all who are baptized and hearing the Gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ and forgiveness and salvation through His perfect life on this earth, sacrificial death on the cross, and glorious resurrection from the tomb.

The result is the same as on the day of Pentecost. The focus on that day was not the wind and the flames, but on the proclamation of the message. The focus of the prophecy from Joel is not on miracles that those filled with the Holy Spirit will perform, but that they will "prophesy". This word, in its Biblical context, does not mean to "tell the future" or necessarily to "preach". It simply means to speak on behalf of God.

God has a message for this world today. It is a message of law and condemnation for a world that claims no absolute standards of right and wrong or standards which are much different than God's standards. It is also a message of Gospel -- God's love and forgiveness through the work of Jesus Christ; God's presence and support in this life; and a life after death which is free from evil and the corruption of sin.

God calls all who are filled with His Spirit to prophesy -- to speak on His behalf -- that message. It doesn't matter if you are male or female, young or old, whether you occupy a pulpit, a tractor, a classroom, a factory, or some other vocation. You, in these latter days, will speak that message to a world so desperate to hear it. And God's Holy Spirit who has been poured out in you will flow out through you so that that message may be heard, received, and believed as it was by you.

There is a story in 2 Kings 4 about the prophet Elisha and a poor woman whose husband had died and left behind a sizable debt. Creditors were about to take her sons as payment in the debt and the only thing of value she had left was a little olive oil in a bottle. So Elisha told her to borrow all the cups, pitchers, bowls, vessels, and whatever she could get her hands on. "Get lots, not a few!" Then he told her to start pouring...and pouring...and pouring. As long as there was another vessel, the oil kept pouring. At Pentecost, just as God promised through Joel, Christ poured out His Holy Spirit on

all mankind -- men, women, sons, daughters, old, young -- the Spirit never runs out. Every time a baby is baptized, every time the cross of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, every time absolution is spoken or the body and blood of Jesus distributed, the Holy Spirit keeps pouring...and pouring...and pouring. You -- keep receiving...and receiving...and receiving. And in your homes, in your vocations, and in your community keep on proclaiming...and proclaiming...and proclaiming. The Spirit never runs out. His grace never runs out. Your proclaiming never runs out. Amen.