

WOULD THAT THE LORD WOULD PUT HIS SPIRIT ON ALL HIS PEOPLE

Pentecost
May 28, 2023

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Numbers 11:24–30
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Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The text for today's sermon is Numbers 11:24–30:

²⁴**So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. ²⁵Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.**

²⁶**Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” ²⁸And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” ²⁹But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” ³⁰And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.**

Our reading begins with the word *so*. “So, Moses went out.” That word “*so*” tells us we are at the end of this story. Much has happened before the few verses we heard today. When Moses says, “**Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them**” (v 29), he is speaking words that bring to conclusion a much longer series of events. And those words, spoken in response to Joshua’s call to stop two men from prophesying, become a promise that would be fulfilled

many years later. Moses probably had little idea he was speaking about what would happen on Pentecost Sunday, but on that first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured down on God's people. And ever since, the Spirit has been placed on all God's people in a way greater than before.

I.

The exodus narrative begins with God's people suffering in slavery under a cruel Pharaoh. God calls Moses to lead His people out of slavery, out of Egypt. This was not an easy task. It took 10 plagues to convince Pharaoh to let the people leave Egypt. It was an epic battle between the Pharaoh, whom the Egyptians viewed as a god, and the true God the God of the people of Israel. After the tenth plague, the death of all the firstborn, except the people of Israel were spared by putting the blood of a perfect lamb on the door frames of their houses as a signal for the angel of death to pass over their homes.

Once the people are on the move Pharaoh chases them to the Red Sea where God parts the waters to let the people cross. When Pharaoh's army tries to follow God let the waters of sea fall, destroying the entire army.

The people then camped around Mt. Sinai. Almost immediately the people started to grumble. Moses was taking too long on the mountain, so they made a golden calf to worship. They complained that they had no water, so God provided water from a rock. The people complained about lack of food. So, God provided manna and quail. The number of people could easily have been one-and-a-half to two million people that needed to be fed. I suppose eating that manna every day could probably be compared to eating oatmeal every day. We would probably end up complaining as well.

When this group – this multitude -- finally reached the promised land they sent in spies to discover what was in store for them. The ten spies went in and when they returned eight of the ten said the land and its people were too dangerous and the people decided not to go in.

Acknowledgments: The following resources were used in the preparation of this sermon: The Greek New Testament © 1983 United Bible Societies; Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament © 1980 Zondervan Publishing House; A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament © 1971 United Bible Societies; Theological Dictionary of the New Testament © 1964 Eerdmans Publishing; Analytical Greek New Testament © Baker Book House Company; The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. © 2001 Wheaton: Standard Bible Society; Biblia Hebraica © 1937 Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart; Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon © 1969 Eerdmans Publishing; Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament © 1980 Moody Bible Institute; The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English © 1987 Hendrickson Publishers; Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch © 1989 Hendrickson Publishers; Concordia Self-Study Commentary © 1979 Concordia Publishing House; Concordia – The Lutheran Confessions © 2006 Concordia Publishing House; Concordia Pulpit Resources © 2016 Concordia Publishing House.

extent and degree of the water increases dramatically. The Hoover Dam, for example, provides 4 billion kilowatts per year and powers the homes and businesses of 1.3 million people in Arizona, Nevada, and California. After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's work is unleashed, and the Church grows throughout the world and empowers millions of people to believe and produce the fruit of faith for others to see. *Glenn A. Nielsen, St. Louis, MO*

Moses said, **“Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”** In Word and Sacrament these words of promise are fulfilled.

IV.

St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians, **“Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”** (1 Cor 12:3) Moses’ words have come true for us. God has placed the Holy Spirit on us and has led us to confess Jesus. For example, when children in Sunday School or VBS, sing “This Little Gospel Light of Mine” they are confessing their faith in Jesus. Another example is when you were confirmed you confessed your faith before the congregation. When we say the Creed in worship you are confessing your faith in Jesus.

Moses spoke words of promise: **“Would that the Spirit be on all the Lord’s people.”** In Jesus, our tent of meeting, those words come true. When we meet Jesus in his Word and Sacraments, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is placed upon us, and Moses’ words come true.

Moses’ words – **“that the Lord put his Spirit on all his people”** -- find fulfillment when Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to his church to confess his name.

Every time we confess Jesus as Lord, we see the Holy Spirit active in our lives, and we know that Moses’ words have come true in our lives. Amen.

God then said fine! You will wander around here in the wilderness for forty years – a whole generation. The next forty years was a time of grumbling, dissatisfaction, discontent, turning back to Egypt for blessing and outright rebellion.

Now in all of this let’s focus for a moment on Moses. Think of how challenging it was to lead these people. He was weary and worn. He was discouraged and even asked God to take his life. In answer to his prayer, God gives the seventy elders, and they show some type of prophetic behavior that authenticates their call to help Moses. God even came down to the tent of meeting. It was where he promised to meet Moses and reveal what he was going to do, what he wanted to say, and what he wanted Moses to do and say.

You then have in our text, **“²⁶Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” ²⁸And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” ²⁹But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”**

II.

Moses wasn’t intentionally speaking a prophecy in his response to Joshua, but it becomes that. We have a tent of meeting where the Spirit is placed upon all God’s people. His name is Jesus. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, **“¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. “** (Heb 9:11–12) No longer does God come down in a cloud, but in a manger, he comes down as a baby. His ministry begins with

his Baptism, and the Father's voice is joined by the Holy Spirit in the likeness of a dove. Jesus' whole ministry is accompanied by the Holy Spirit placed on him. All Jesus said and did revealed what God wanted for his people. When people heard Jesus, they heard God speaking to them. When they saw Jesus doing something, they saw God in action. In Jesus, we meet God.

Then on the cross, Jesus meets everything that would keep the Spirit from being placed on us. All our complaining and discouragement, our rebellion and weariness, our idolatry and deep resignation -- all of it meets Jesus, and he sheds his blood to bring forgiveness for all of it. He secures an eternal redemption for us. We are delivered.

When Jesus rises from the dead, he spends time with the disciples. But then he ascends into heaven. And ten days later, he sends the Spirit. Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts begins, **"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹²And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ..." (Acts 2:1-15)

Remember Moses' words in our text? **"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"** (v. 29b) In Jesus, our tent of meeting, his words come true. He places his Spirit on us.

III.

Where do we meet Jesus as our tent of meeting today? When does he place his Spirit on us now? Go back to your Baptism. When the water was combined with "In the name of the Father and the Son and the *Holy Spirit*," Jesus scooped us up as his own people. All of us received his Spirit on that day. When we come to the Lord's Supper, we meet Jesus in his very body and blood, and he sends us from that altar with the Spirit placed on us again. We open the Bible, and the Word brings us to Jesus. We meet him there, and his Spirit pours into our lives.

Think of it this way. I once read that Pentecost is like opening the floodgates of a dam and the Spirit bursting forth to create and grow the Church. But I see the analogy differently.

When a dam designed for hydroelectric power is built, some of the river continues to flow downstream. Those who live near the river have water to grow gardens and fields. Towns have water for drinking and bathing. Recreational sports go on in the reservoir formed by the dam and downstream.

Before Pentecost, the work of the Holy Spirit was less evident, found mainly in Israel, particularly for major events like the prophets (Num 11:25, 29). It's like the people near the river. But when the switch is thrown and the water running through the dam is used for generating electricity, the