

24

May

Spirit Unbound

God Poured Out

DAY OF PENTECOST, YEAR A

Pentecost Sunday celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers, empowering the church for mission and proclaiming that God’s Spirit is unbound and available to all.

REFERENCES

Numbers 11:24-30

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

COLORS

Red

Preaching Notes

DAY OF PENTECOST - MAY 24, 2026 – SPIRIT UNBOUNDED

Color: Red

Focus Texts: Numbers 11:24-30, Acts 2:1-21

Would that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!
(Numbers 11:29 NRSV)

Would that we were! Would that we had a statement to make, a stand to take. Would that we advocate for justice, represent the marginalized, and welcome the stranger. “Would that all the

Lord's people were prophets!" says Moses with some exasperation, perhaps. Why is God so stingy with the Spirit? Moses had to share what was within him. Does God have a limited supply?

That seems to be part of Joshua's fear. "Stop them" is his response to the word that there might be some unauthorized prophesying, that something leaked out that needed to be nipped in the bud before it flowered into something that was against them or that diminished them. Worse yet, something that steals some of the authority of Moses. Joshua is "team Moses" all the way and doesn't want to see anyone stepping into the place and stealing that primacy.

Moses has different ideas about leadership, which, for Moses, are different ideas about the Spirit. Moses is happy to share. He is happy to offer what is within him to the seventy elders so that they, too, can prophesy to the people.

But what does that mean, exactly? What is being shared, and what are they prophesying about? Has Moses just created a team of fortune tellers predicting the future? No, this Spirit that now is shared is what a leader needs to lead God's people. It is the ability to tell the truth and have empathy to care for the people one is leading. That seems a stretch, I know, but that is what appears to be at the heart of this event. Let us tell the truth about what God is doing in our midst and the truth about what we are doing (or not doing) in response. And let us do it because we care about the people we lead. We care about their well-being; we care about their survival. We care about their relationships within the community of pilgrims. We care about their thriving as whole people, and we care about their walk with God every single day of their lives.

This is leading with the Spirit, not with human power and authority. Those authoritarians are right to be afraid of or concerned about empathy. It is a dangerous effect. But they are wrong to claim it makes you soft. Empathy makes you strong because it is so difficult. Even Moses wanted to get out from under it more than once. He argued with God on the mountain, saying your people are a pain in my existential ground of being! Your people! But in the end, he protected his people; he led his people; he cared about his people because that is what good leaders, Spirit-filled leaders, do.

Moses was not diminished by sharing the Spirit that was within him with the seventy elders. He lost none of the empathetic leadership and authority that he had. He could still tell the truth. He could still lead toward a vision given to him by God. He was not diminished by sharing this Spirit any more than love is diminished by giving it away. The more we love, the more capacity we have to love. The more we care for the people around us, the more we are able to tell them the truth about the world, about themselves and their behaviors, about the consequences and the benefits to

come. We tell the truth to the people we care about. Leaders who wield power through lies, threats, and othering are not leading with the Spirit given to them by God.

Moses's complaint was that there weren't more out there leading with this Spirit. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets" – prophets who tell the truth, prophets who care for the people, prophets who claim the vision that comes from God of a new way of living in this world and the next. "Would that all the Lord's people ..." And God heard that prayer, and we have Pentecost.

Peter stands in for Moses on this incredible day and announces that Moses's prayer has been answered. This Spirit, once sparsely shared, is now poured out on all flesh, as the Prophet Joel predicted. All flesh. Sons and daughters shall prophesy (Acts 2:17 NRSV). Did you hear that? In the church that has struggled with women in leadership, the Pentecostal message is that the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, sons and daughters. Daughters and sons.

Young shall see visions, and old shall dream dreams (Acts 2:17 NRSV). Did you hear that? For the church that has struggled with youth in leadership or with ignoring the wisdom of the elders, the Pentecostal message is that age is no barrier to the ability to prophesy, to tell the truth with empathy to God's people.

"Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I shall pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18 NRSV). Did you hear that? In the church that has struggled with marginalized and economically disadvantaged people and their role in the church and society, the Pentecostal message is that even the poor, even those bound by economic and racial systems of oppression, have a truth to tell and a story to be heard.

Pentecost is the fulfillment of the heartfelt hope of Moses wandering through the wilderness with people who were only barely on board with the vision. What seemed like lack of access to the Spirit would be one day unbound by that limitation and poured out on all flesh. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets." We can wonder whether the Spirit was really that limited in Moses's day. But we can't really know. All we can be sure of if it was limited is that it no longer is. The Spirit is unbound, if it ever was. Or maybe we have been unbound so we can now receive that Spirit and learn to tell the truth with empathy in a world desperately in need of both.

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