

Sermon – May 19, 2024
“I will pour out my Spirit”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Acts 2:1-21

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that leads us to life eternal and fruitful labor as we abide in you and labor on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Today is Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter, ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven. Jesus' disciples are gathered together and have been praying for the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Spirit of Jesus, to come. They are longing for and praising God for the promised gift from Jesus to arrive. The disciples' hearts are open, expectant, and yearning for this gift. As I read this text, I hear the words speak to Jesus' disciples' strong desire to receive the Comforter, to receive Holy Spirit. May our hearts also be open and yearning to receive Holy Spirit.

On the first Pentecost, the disciples are all gathered together in one place as we are this morning. And then comes the sound like the rush of a mighty violent wind. Something new is happening. The sound fills the place where they are, and then appear divided tongues, as of fire, with a tongue of fire resting on each of them. And when the tongues of fire appear, the disciples are each filled with Holy Spirit and begin to speak in other languages. What God did at Babel, confusing the languages of the people, at Pentecost He undoes through Holy Spirit, allowing the people gathered to hear the disciples speaking in their native tongues. There are more tongues listed in the text than the twelve apostles, so we know all disciples have received Holy Spirit and are speaking in the languages of the world. What they are speaking about are God's deeds of power done through the ages and by Jesus on the cross. They are giving glory and praise to God.

Yet even in the midst of the ongoing speech and praise of God, some of those who hear their words are skeptical and attribute what is happening to those speaking being drunk. Denial of the message, no matter how well the message is attested to, will always be present. Peter stands up to help those who have been drawn to what is happening understand what they are witnessing. Peter turns to Joel 2:28 and 29 and shares with them a familiar text: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”¹ Peter reminds the crowd what they had been told of by the prophet Joel, the coming of Holy Spirit, and says that what has happened that morning is the outpouring of God’s Spirit. Notice the gifts of the Spirit that Joel speaks to: prophesy, visions, and dreams. Notice also that Joel states that the Spirit of God will not just be poured out on the people of Israel but will be poured out on their slaves as well. The outpouring of Holy Spirit is not just for a few people but is for all.

Jesus had prepared his disciples for this moment and when it occurred, they were ready. They were waiting expectantly to receive Holy Spirit, to move into Jesus’ mission in power and to continue his mission to all people. The disciples received power from on high to become those who are continuing the mission of Jesus. When I was in seminary, I took advantage of classes focused on Holy Spirit as I did not have an in-depth understanding of Holy Spirit. Throughout my life, I do not recall much of an emphasis on the third person of the Trinity and so I sought to gain understanding and knowledge about Holy Spirit. I would suspect that if I took a survey about our understanding of Holy Spirit, the responses would not communicate an in-depth knowledge of Holy Spirit. As I was drafting this sermon, I realized that I have not shared much of what I learned and am still learning about Holy Spirit, and thought this morning might be a good time to provide some insight into the third member of the Trinity. Let’s see if we can begin to answer the question many of us will have, “Who is Holy Spirit?” First and foremost, Holy Spirit is a person. That person’s name is Holy Spirit. We do not say “the Jesus” or “the John” and we should not say “the Holy Spirit” as Holy Spirit is not a thing but a person. Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We speak about our belief in Holy Spirit each week in the Apostle’s Creed. We say, “I believe in Holy Spirit” and yes, the writers of the Apostle’s Creed put the article in front of Holy Spirit. One of the reasons we do not know

a great deal about Holy Spirit is that in the United Methodist Church in the last century there was not a great deal of emphasis on Holy Spirit. John Wesley was not like that. He put a great amount of emphasis on Holy Spirit and the people called Methodists being Spirit-filled and Spirit-led people. Another reason we know little about Holy Spirit is that he always points to the Father and the Son and never to himself. So, let's ask ourselves, "What do we know about Holy Spirit?" Peter uses the passage from Joel to remind people in Jerusalem of the coming of Holy Spirit. He summarizes some of the work of Holy Spirit as seen in the results of his being poured out on believers as prophecy, dreams, and visions. Also, we know that as Holy Spirit comes on the disciples, they are able to prophesy, to speak in tongues, languages they do not know. They are able to heal as Jesus healed and to forgive sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that Holy Spirit is spirit and not physical. The limitations on how much Holy Spirit we can receive seem to be how much power we can be filled with or how much of Jesus' love we can receive. When we speak of being filled with Holy Spirit, we are not filling up our bodies with a physical presence but with a spirit. There is plenty of room in our spirit to receive more of Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. As a member of the Trinity, Holy Spirit is co-equal with the other two members. Through Holy Spirit, we are invited into the love relationship between the Father and the Son by Jesus, and Holy Spirit is the path through which we receive that perfect love. Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers in Jesus as they are needed for the building up of the body of Christ. We read in this morning's scripture about the gift of tongues, speaking in languages one does not know, about the mighty acts of God. The gift of tongues is one of the many gifts or manifestations given as Holy Spirit interacts with believers. Also notice the new boldness and wisdom with which Peter stands up and addresses the critics and guides many of those listening into a relationship with Jesus. Peter is enabled by Holy Spirit to have the boldness and words needed to address those listening and to guide them to faith in Jesus. When we are filled with Holy Spirit, we should expect also to have a boldness and wisdom to speak to others about Jesus. If we will recall from the Acts sermon series last fall, it was not too many days after the arrival of Holy Spirit, that Peter and John healed a lame man in Jesus' name who then leapt about the temple praising God. Through Holy Spirit being poured out on people, Jesus' mission to all people continues. When we receive Holy Spirit, we should expect to find ourselves with a renewed desire to share Jesus with other people, to be part of Jesus' mission.

There are many manifestations we may experience as we receive Holy Spirit, such as tears, laughter, being stricken before God, and peace we have never known. When we receive Holy Spirit, the only manifestation we may have is an inner change deep within our souls. The list of possible manifestations goes on but the surest way to realize we have received Holy Spirit is if we find afterwards that we have a new desire for Jesus and to be part of his mission. If we receive Holy Spirit and do not find a renewed desire within our hearts for our Lord and Savior, we should look carefully at what we have experienced. At the recent outpouring of Holy Spirit at Asbury University, the primary response was a desire for joyful repentance and worship of Jesus. Yes, during those days at Asbury there were healings and liberations from sin, but from all I have read and heard shared so far, the primary response of people was repentance in joy and worship of Jesus. Those I have met and heard share about their experience do have a new intensity to share Jesus with others and to help others worship Jesus. They have a new and notable love of Jesus that is unique in my limited experience.

We are gathered here on the Sunday when we celebrate the coming of Holy Spirit on the Christian calendar. We, like the disciples on the first Pentecost, have gathered together and are worshiping Jesus and are asking for him to pour out Holy Spirit among and on us. As we wait for an outpouring of Holy Spirit in this place, there are a few things we should do to prepare ourselves. The first is to get thirsty. Now the thirst I am referring to is not our physical need for hydration or a cup of coffee but to allow our souls, our inward place of thinking, to begin to thirst for Holy Spirit and to desire to know Jesus more fully. If we find within our hearts a growing awareness of a need for more of Jesus, if we don't like the way we are and we struggle with sin management and are not victorious, we are getting thirsty for something more. If we are hoping that there is more to following Jesus than what we are experiencing, then we are beginning to get thirsty. If we hear the cry of those lost in sin as a cry for us to help them, to go and find them in the world, if our hearts are stirred with discontent for the way things are in our lives and in the world, then we are beginning to get thirsty for Holy Spirit.

Another indicator that we are thirsty for Holy Spirit is if we have a growing feeling of inadequacy for the ministry we have been called to or think we are called to but have not yet begun to be part of. If we are beginning to recognize a need for something more than our own strength, our own abilities, to be effective laborers in Jesus' mission, then we are beginning to thirst for a filling of Holy Spirit. Peter was called to speak to the people drawn to the sound of

the mighty rushing wind, and after being filled with Holy Spirit, he stood up and boldly spoke to those drawn to the sound about Jesus' love for them. And on that day, thousands became followers of Christ. Our thirst may not lead us to speak to thousands but it will enable us to share Jesus's love with those to whom we are led by Holy Spirit. And don't be surprised if we find ourselves with a new desire to pray for the salvation of others, starting with our own family members. Travailing prayer is a sign of our getting thirsty for Holy Spirit.

There is another action we need to take to prepare ourselves to receive Holy Spirit. We need to get empty. We may have in our lives things that block Holy Spirit, things that are stopping us from growing into the image of Christ. We may have things that are keeping us from being filled with Holy Spirit. To get empty, we need to look within ourselves and see ourselves as God sees us. We need to find those areas of our lives that we have hidden from God, who actually knows about them despite our attempts to hide them, and is waiting in love to lift them from us. We need to be willing to repent and allow Jesus to forgive our sins, to empty us of our desires that are not of God and to heal our brokenness. We may have feelings of not being adequate for working in Jesus' mission, but we also may have sin that blocks us from receiving the fullness of Jesus' love. When we look inward at our lives, we may be reminded of past struggles that we feel keep us from the love of Jesus. We may look within our hearts and find that which we think disqualifies us from Jesus' love. First, let me tell us that those thoughts are lies from the pit of hell. Jesus Christ bore our sins on the cross and we are forgiven. Jesus waits for us, gives us the desire to be free from our sin, and waits with his arms wide open to receive our sins, empty us of them, and heal the brokenness sin brings in our lives. I think one of the reasons we see repentance in joy as such a strong part of what was experienced at Asbury is that we all have a need to bring junk from our past to Jesus and receive forgiveness. We desire for him to empty us, yet we cling in fear, shame, and hope that we will never have to admit who we truly are and what we have done. Jesus longs for us to repent so that he might forgive us and fill us with the joy that comes with repentance and forgiveness. We need to get empty to be filled with Holy Spirit, and Jesus waits for us to come to him so that we might find the joy of repentance in his holy presence.

When Peter speaks the words of Joel's prophecy to the people drawn to the disciples at the first Pentecost, he makes a change in Joel's words. In Joel's prophecy, the word is "afterwards," as in after events Joel has outlined when the Spirit will be poured out. When Peter

speaks to the crowd, he tells them instead “in the last days” will be the time when the Spirit will be poured out. We live in the time of the last days. We live in the age of Holy Spirit. We live in a time when those who follow Jesus can and do receive Holy Spirit. We live in a time when we thirst for Jesus and in response to our thirst, he will give us the water of life. We live in a time when if we will get empty, Holy Spirit will be poured out on us so that we might be enabled to continue Jesus’ mission to all people.

As we end our worship today, I am going to offer to pray for any who are thirsty and desire to be emptied so that they may receive Holy Spirit. After I pray the closing prayer for the sermon, I will step out of the pulpit and if you have a desire to receive Holy Spirit, if you are thirsty, if you are ready to be emptied of the burdens you seek to carry, come to the altar, and kneel or stand. I will ask you what you want Jesus to do for you and we will pray about that and then I will place a hand on your shoulder and pray for you to receive Holy Spirit. If you are holding onto things that you need to be emptied of, then come and tell me not what those things are but that you have burdens you want to give to Jesus. The words you will hear are “In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.” And then I will put a hand on your shoulder and pray for you to receive Holy Spirit. There are many manifestations of Holy Spirit and what else we might experience as Holy Spirit comes upon us, I do not know. As a pastor I can follow the bulletin and guide us through a worship service, but when I ask for you to receive Holy Spirit, I am surrendering control to Holy Spirit to be poured out and guide us. It is a time when we surrender control to Holy Spirit and follow his lead. Those who are thirsty come to the altar as we sing the closing hymn and linger there as long as you need. Come and let Jesus fill us with the water of life.

Pray with me: Jesus, we thirst for your Spirit to fill us. Jesus, we give you permission to remove, heal, and restore us to be empty vessels waiting for your love. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come, Lord Jesus, come, and fill us with Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of the Father and the Son and in the power of Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Go forth into Jesus’ mission.

ⁱ NRSV Bible Acts 2:1-21 Harper Bibles. NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (Kindle Locations 80989-81011). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.