

June 12, 2011  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Numbers 11:24-30  
1Corinthians 12:3b-13

## That All Would Have the Spirit

### **Introduction**

Today we are celebrating Pentecost. Pentecost is a Jewish feast day – or festival. These feasts and festivals – much like our Memorial Day and our 4<sup>th</sup> of July – were intended to serve as reminders of what had been done – what gift had been given – that benefited – the whole of a nation, or a people.

Pentecost was a celebration of the giving of the Law – the Ten Commandments – to Israel while they were in the wilderness at Mt Sinai. Pentecost was a day of celebration and a day of joy. Offerings would be made to God – a couple loaves of bread – the good stuff – made with the best flour. There was the offering of a lamb or some other animal – as a sin and peace offering – an act of being reconciled with God.

This is not what we celebrate today. It is not Ten Commandment Day – instead, we - on this side of Jesus - we who find ourselves in the community of faith that calls itself Christian – we are celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.

What we are celebrating is what we often refer to as the birthday of the church.

Now I would remind you that being born is not as easy or as simple as we might want to make it. The disciples, who have according to Luke in the Book of Acts, are being pushed out into the

world – a world that will be hostile to their witness to Jesus as the Son of God – the Messiah – the one who has come to save them and us.

The birth of that early church is not as romantic as sometimes we like to think it – *‘everyone sharing all they had with any who had need – spending time at the temple – sharing pot luck meals in their homes – praising God – and having the goodwill of people.’* (Acts 2:43f)

It is not that those things didn’t happen – but like a toddler taking their first steps – there were trials and errors – the new church would fall from time to time – skinning its knees – bumping its head. There was conflict and divisions – power struggles and disagreements – (and that was all within the church).

What we are celebrating is Pentecost the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church.

We have two readings this morning. The first one comes from the Book of Numbers. I chose this Old Testament reading to remind us that the Holy Spirit doesn’t just sit around waiting – and finally appears on Pentecost – but the Holy Spirit is very present in the Old Testament. The word in the Hebrew sometimes translated for us as spirit – is ‘ruah’. Ruah is also translated as wind, or breath, or the breath that gives life.

Numbers gets its name from a census taken of the people – Israel – during their wilderness experience – after they have fled Egypt and as they languish (maybe that is the best term to describe spending 40 years) in the wilderness.

As we come to our passage this morning, Moses has had enough – Israel – with all their grumbling and griping – all their complaining about how good they use to have it in Egypt and how they long for the good old days – has flat worn him out. Moses complains to God that he is overworked and underpaid. God offers help by sharing the spirit – that he has placed on Moses – with the leaders of Israel. The spirit's presence represents both the giftedness for leading and their authority as leaders of Israel.

Our second reading comes from Paul's letter to the church in Corinthian. Paul is talking to this church about worship – and about the use of gifts – gifts like the speaking of tongues – the gift of prophecy – the gift of knowledge – in worship. As we come to our reading Paul expands his thought to think about the Spirit's work in the church – in the community of faith – how spiritual gifts come by the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of ordinary people like you and I – and how – if we were to read on – all gifts – the ones that appear great and the ones that appear small – are important in the life of the church and the life of the community.

In several ways these two passages challenge our thinking about the Holy Spirit. First we see in Numbers a portrait of a Spirit that is limited – limited in capacity – there is only so much of God's spirit. The Spirit is like peanut butter in a jar. God opens the jar and spreads the peanut butter that he had given to Moses around – but when the jar is empty well it is empty.

Sometimes this is how we think about ‘gifts’ for ministry. Well they have it and we don’t. I mean, I can’t preach – I can’t go to the hospital to bring care and comfort – I can’t pray – I can’t help teach Sunday School – I can’t sing – I can’t....

Our reading from 1Corinthians – reminds us that ‘to each of us’ – each of us who have felt the call of Jesus to come and follow – each of us who have said yes to that call – each of us that have committed ourselves to being disciples – that – we all – not just a few of us but all of us – young and old – have been *‘given something to do that shows who God is’ – ‘Everyone gets in on it – and everyone benefits from it.’*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing is that there is a hierarchy of gifts – that some are more important – more special – more... Our reading from Numbers shows that the spirit is being spread to those in leadership. Our reading from 1Corinthians is a part of a discussion on how people’s insistence that their spiritual gift is the more important – therefore giving them both prestige and privilege in the community.

Paul reminds us later in 1Corinthians – that those gifts – just like parts of the body – are all important – and the body can’t function wholly – healthily – unless all the parts are there working as they should.

**Prayer**  
**Scripture**

We as Presbyterians have, for the most part, a diminished Pneumatology. Right now you are wondering if you might have this mysterious disease – aren't you. Right now you are looking to either side of you – wondering if it is contagious – wondering if it is something that you might catch from those sitting on either side of you. ( ☺ - Don't worry we have hand sanitizer in the back.)

Pneumatology is simply what we believe about the person and work of the Holy Spirit – and while we certainly have a robust Christology (what we believe about Christ) and Theology (what we believe about God) – what we believe about the Holy Spirit is often summed up in the Apostle's Creed where we say '*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*' That is it – the long and the short of it.

But what is it we believe about the Holy Spirit – who is the Holy Spirit and what does the Holy Spirit do?

*Maybe you can help me this morning with this – if you would take a few moments – and share with those around you – maybe we can learn from one another something about who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does.*

Who is the Holy Spirit?

- 1) The Holy Spirit is God – a part of the Triune God.
- 2) The Holy Spirit is a particular way of speaking about God.
- 3) The Holy Spirit as God co-exists eternally in community with the Father and the Son.

- 4) The Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as a wind, as breath, or the breath of life – as well as Spirit, or God’s Spirit, or the Holy Ghost.
- 5) The Holy Spirit is God’s very self – the essence – an essential part of our understanding of God.
- 6) The Holy Spirit, I would say, is the relational part of God – the God – that we experience day in and day out.

What is the work of the Holy Spirit?

- 1) The Holy Spirit is the wind – the breath of life – in the midst of God’s creating work.
- 2) The Holy Spirit – gives authority – like we see in our passage from Numbers this morning.
- 3) The Holy Spirit – is God in and among us. In the gospel of John Jesus says that he will not leave us as orphans but he will send the Spirit who will teach us everything – reminding us of the teaching of our teacher – Jesus.
- 4) The Holy Spirit gives birth to the Church of Jesus Christ – the Holy Spirit gives the Church its authority and its witness in the world – the Holy Spirit binds us in community.
- 5) The Holy Spirit is the Advocate, or Intercession – mediating our relationship with God – Father, Son, and Spirit.
- 6) The Holy Spirit is the one who opens us and brings us into faith in Jesus Christ. ‘No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit’ our reading from 1Corinthians says.

- 7) The Holy Spirit – is the giver of gifts (abilities, talents, activities) – abilities, talents, activities – that are not meant to serve us – but are meant to ‘serve the common good’ – meant to witness to the transforming presence of Jesus Christ in our lives as people and as communities of faith - as we see in our passage from 1Corinthians and in other places.
- 8) The Holy Spirit, as the ancient Nicene Creed puts it – ‘the Lord and giver of life’.
- 9) The Holy Spirit, as my friend Joe Marting always said – gives us the power to be the people of God.

That’s just a partial list.

So what does this look like – this Spirit who is not so much poured out over us – but is at work in us and through us?

A woman came into the office this week to make a delivery. She is a regular, usually coming by a couple times a month. While she was here she told Terry and Sandy that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer and was undergoing treatment for it. She told them of the day she went to get her biopsy – to determine if the mass in her breast was cancerous or not. She had this very real feeling of God holding her hand. She said at first she felt that this meant she would not have cancer – and then later recognized that it was the hand of God that would be her strength and her comfort – during this time.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

I had a man who last week after the service – came up to me and told me that he could only write one thing about growing in his relationship with God and others. He has felt challenged lately – challenged to continue to grow in his faith.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

I watched this week as once again the kitchen filled with food and the funeral ministry team extended gracious hospitality to a family that was grieving.

I listened to a man talk about how grateful he was for the visitors that came each and every day while he was in the hospital.

I heard of a woman who continues to care for others – even when she has every reason to simply talk care of herself.

The Holy Spirit is there in our acts of generosity, hospitality and caring.

The place we find ourselves as a congregation – as we come to this place – as we hear the call of God to be witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ through the ways we are in relationships with God and others – through the ways we are welcoming – and caring – and growing – and generous. – The ways we are being stretched and challenged – threatened and afraid – joyful and

secure – unsure and certain – all this is the work of the Holy Spirit – transforming not just me or you – but all of us.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the HOLY SPIRIT. Amen