

Spirit Unbounded

May 24, 2026

Numbers 11:24-30

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the Lord's words. He assembled seventy men from the people's elders and placed them around the tent. ²⁵ The Lord descended in a cloud, spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy elders. When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but only this once. ²⁶ Two men had remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the second named Medad, and the spirit rested on them.

They were among those registered, but they hadn't gone out to the tent, so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ Joshua, Nun's son and Moses' assistant since his youth, responded, "My master Moses, stop them!" ²⁹ Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? If only all the Lord's people were prophets with the Lord placing his spirit on them!" ³⁰ Moses and Israel's elders were assembled in the camp.

Acts 2:1-21

¹ When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. ⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

⁵ There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. ⁷ They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them?" ⁸ How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” ¹² They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” ¹³ Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!”

¹⁴ Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! ¹⁵ These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning! ¹⁶ Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be changed into blood, before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.



This Sunday and next Sunday we will focus on a short series called “God Poured Out.” When you hear that phrase, what comes to your mind? Does this phrase remind you of a time when God poured out

abundant blessings or reassuring peace or needed comfort in your life? Does this phrase remind you of a time when you gave much in the service of God or neighbor, of a time when you felt poured out, of a time when you felt empty but so full at the same time? As we think about God being poured out today, though, we recognize that God pours out very differently than we pour out. God is infinite and unlimited; we are finite and limited.

God operates from a place of abundance and generosity. We, on the other hand, can struggle with a fear of scarcity and with gathering for self. God's love is unlimited. Too often our love is affected by our biases and prejudices and preconceived notions about who is worthy or unworthy of our love. Today we focus on how God abundantly and graciously pours out into our lives and how we are, in turn, called to pour God out into the world. God invites us to continually participate in the pouring out of love and grace and forgiveness and hope into the world. As the Spirit moves among us this morning and in our day-to-day lives, our questions are these: Will we join in? Will we be poured out? Will we willingly and continuously join in the work of the Holy Spirit as it seeks to transform our lives and our world. As we consider this invitation today, let us pray...

Spirit of Creation, you call us into being. Spirit of life, you breathe your presence into us. Spirit of love, you fill us with blessings for others. Spirit of Christ, you breathe us into the world. Spirit of God, be our life and our power. Spirit of God, make us your body of Christ. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

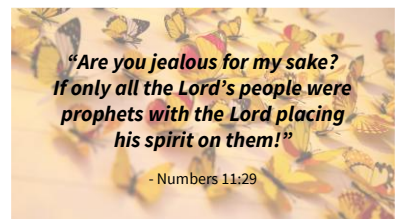


Last Sunday we talked about unity in the body of Christ. Specifically, we talked about how unity empowers our witness in the world and about how unity deepens our faith, our understanding of Jesus, and our love for one another. Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first believers. In our Christian faith, we often think of this day and this event in Jerusalem as the first outpouring of the Spirit. It is not so. Please turn with me to Numbers 11, beginning in verse 24, as we look into another outpouring of the Spirit of God.

As we turn to Numbers 11, a little context. At the beginning of chapter 11, the “riffraff” stirred up the people to complain to Moses about a lack of meat. It is nothing but manna, manna, and more manna! This crying out upsets Moses and brought up outrage in the Lord God. Moses is frustrated – this is not the people’s first round of complaining and grumbling. Moses does not know what to do, so he does what we talked about last week: he surrenders to God. While he maybe could have phrased it better, here are Moses words of surrender in Numbers 11, verses 14 and 15: *“I can’t bear this people on my own. They’re too heavy for me. If you’re going to treat me like this, please kill me.”* God understands and God comes up with a plan.

God will first deal with the people and their crying out for meat. God will give the people meat, a great overabundance of meat. And God will lighten Moses’ burden. As we turn to our Old Testament passage for today, we see the plan of God unfolding. Moses selects 70 elders from the people, and they gather around the tent of meeting. The Lord descends in a cloud and *“took some of the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy elders.”* The spirit of God leads these men to prophesy, to speak the word of God. But this outpouring of the spirit is not limited to those gathered around the tent.

There are two elders still in camp that also receive the Holy Spirit. Eldad and Medad also being to prophesy. A young man runs and tells Moses about this strange happening. And Joshua, Moses’ assistant, insists that Moses stop them. It is funny how protective we can be at times, isn’t it? I love Moses’ response to Joshua: *“Are you jealous for my sake? If only all the Lord’s people were prophets with the Lord placing his spirit on them!”* If Moses had his way, all 600,000 men in camp would be filled with the Spirit. I do not believe there is a church leader who wouldn’t feel the same way! Myself included!



Moses is elated that the spirit of God has been shared. Imagine what it would have felt like to lead and be in charge of 600,000 men plus women and children – all by yourself. Moses does not want the sharing to stop with the 72 elders either. Moses knows what all good leaders know. Any organization – a church, a business, a club, a team, a family – is better off when more people are playing a part and are contributing to that organization. When I pray for the Holy Spirit to be a part of our lives on a Sunday morning or whenever, I'm not just praying for a few of you to be filled with the Spirit. No, I want God to fill us all with the Holy Spirit.

This outpouring of the Spirit was God's response to Moses' need. This is God's abundant love being released on behalf of one who loved God: Moses. And the funny thing was, Moses was not lessened or diminished by sharing the spirit, as Joshua feared. It was just the opposite.

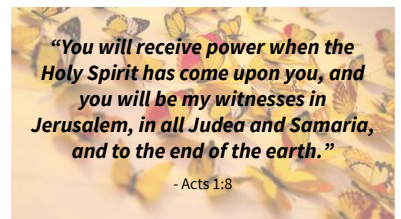
As the spirit was unbounded, Moses' burden was lifted and he was able to be a better leader. You know, love works the same way in our lives. When we love others, when we give love away, we are not lessened or somehow depleted. The more we love, the more our capacity to love grows. The more our love is unbounded, the more our love flows outward into the world.



In our Numbers passage we see an example of God caring for one of God's own. This is an example that we should follow. And we do. As believers we are called to care for one another, to help one another, to carry one another's load or burdens at times. When we do so, we give life to one another. We lift one another. We bless one another. This is definitely something that Kristin and I felt from our church as we talked about and planned and lived out a 4-week short-term leave. The love and support and encouragement and willingness to help so that it could happen was simply amazing. Thank you again.

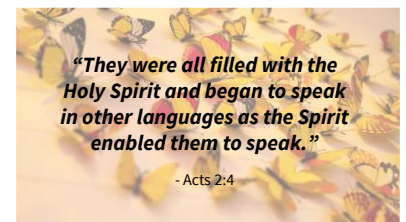
Fast forward a couple of thousand years in the Bible and we are gathered with the disciples in a small house, someplace in Jerusalem. The city is filled with people, there to celebrate Shavuot, the Jewish festival thanking God for the harvest. It is 50 days after the celebration of the Passover. On this Pentecost day the disciples are gathered to worship the Lord God. The gathering would have been small. There were about 120 believers at this time. Judas the betrayer has just been replaced by Matthias. Peter, John, and the others were wondering what to do next. At the beginning of Acts, Jesus had promised them that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, saying, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Sounds like a big task – maybe even bigger than leading and guiding 600,000 men plus women and children through the wilderness.



This big task, well, the disciples would need some help, both personally and corporately. God sees a need and God abundantly provides. As the church was gathered on Pentecost Day, suddenly God moved. In verses 2 and 3 there is first a sound from heaven like a *“fierce wind,”* and then what looked a lot like flames seemed to descend and alight on all gathered there. We note that the Holy Spirit did not just fall on the 12 disciples or on them plus a select few. The Holy Spirit fell on all that were gathered there that day. Let’s just say 120.

What happens next is the Spirit at work. In verse 4 we read, *“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.”* We do not know if the 120 believers were speaking in 120 different languages. But we do know that there were enough languages spoken in that moment to meet the needs of God’s unfolding plan.



As this was happening, God's plan was unfolding elsewhere. That fierce wind? It was so loud and so amazing that it drew a big crowd to the place where the believers were gathered. The day it all happened? Yes, it was the culminating day of a week when pious Jews from all over the known world, from *"Jerusalem... all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,"* were there to worship God during the harvest festival. As these devout Jews arrive on the scene, they each hear the good news of Jesus Christ being proclaimed in their own languages. Again, we do not know how many languages were being spoken, but it was a lot. Luke lists 15 different language groups, but it could well have been more.

The Jews that gathered around the house were *"surprised and bewildered."* So much so that they asked themselves, *"What does this mean?"* Some do what we do when we cannot wrap our heads around something that God is doing. We try and dismiss it. Some in the crowd try and attribute it to having too much wine. That does not even make sense. Sometimes the things we come up with when trying to explain away a work of God in our lives doesn't make a lot of sense either. It is then that Peter and the other eleven disciples stand to address the crowd. Peter raises his voice and, newly filled with the Spirit, he begins to speak.

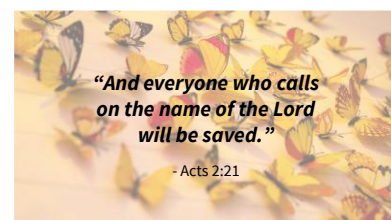
Peter gets their attention and assures them that the believers are not drunk – it is 9:00 in the morning, people. Then, guided by the Spirit, Peter draws upon a passage that would have been very well-known by his audience. Here the Spirit is leading Peter to connect prior knowledge to what is currently happening that day in Jerusalem, helping the disciples and the devout Jewish audience to understand that this act of God is the fulfillment of a prophecy spoken and then written hundreds and hundreds of years ago. This is also an answer to that declaration of Moses: *"If only all the Lord's people were prophets with the Lord placing his spirit on them!"* Yes, if only.

What amazes me about these words quoted from Joel is the breadth and depth of God's love for all people. At a time when God's people sought to keep the circle drawn tightly in, seeking to preserve who and what they were, this prophecy opens the circle wide. Reading from verses 17 and 18, look at who all is included: *"sons and daughters... young... elders... servants... men and women."* God's Spirit is not just poured out upon the religious leaders or just upon the most devout of the Jews. No, young and old, slave and free, men and women – all will receive God's Holy Spirit. And on that day, God says, *"I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."* That day has arrived.

The believers spoke the word of God to a wide audience. People from Rome, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Cyrene, Asia, and the rest of the known world heard the word of God spoken in their own languages. The smaller red boxes represent the 15 named places that were represented that day. They had come to Jerusalem to worship God. Many left Jerusalem, heading back into the world with a new story to tell. That's represented by those pink circles radiating out from Jerusalem.



As Peter wraps up his sermon towards the end of chapter 2, we read that 3,000 were baptized and added to the community of faith that day. Many of those 3,000 would head back home with the Spirit in their hearts and a God story on their lips. They were who Joel was talking about in verse 21 of Acts 2: *"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* The disciples and other believers, along with these new converts to the faith, they call upon the name of the Lord. Through faith in Jesus Christ, they are saved. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they were unbound from a life held captive by sin and death.



Empowered by the Holy Spirit, all believers were freed from the cares and concerns of this life, freed to love God and one another fully, completely, unconditionally. What a story they had to tell!

We too have been empowered by the Spirit. We too have a story to tell. Last Sunday, many of you were gracious enough to share your story. Thank you so much for sharing your stories of faith. If you were unable to be here last week but would be willing to share your story of faith – your pre-Jesus and post-Jesus story – there are some notecards and pens and pencils on the shelf below the window where I grouped and posted last Sunday’s stories. Please include your story in our story.

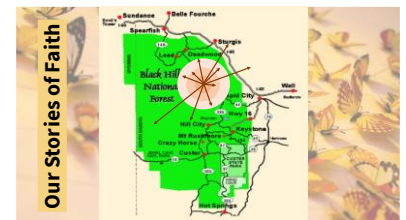
As we turn to our stories of faith, to our collective story, to stories of how God and the Spirit has moved in ways that have led and guided, protected and rescued, helped and comforted, encouraged and assured us, we see how our individual and communal faith has grown, has been tested and refined, has been strengthened and matured.



We have stories of how God was present in times of loss, of how God strengthened us and brought us support and love from the community of faith. We have stories of God’s presence on hard days and in life-threatening situations, stories of how God lifted us or brought us through. We have stories of God’s blessings – of God’s good plans for us, of God’s provision of all we need, of God’s peace in this life, of God’s promise of the better life to come – stories about how we need both “sunshine and rain” to grow in our faith. We have stories of growing up in the church, wandering away, and of coming back to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

We have stories of how God has “taken the wheel” or been our “co-pilot.” Stories of how God has walked with us throughout all of life, constantly coming alongside us in the presence of pastors and other mentors. We have stories of how life was “me against the world,” when we were selfish or sinful, and of how God changed us and brought us into community. We have stories of how God has been with us “in the pit” and in struggles at work, staying present, seeing us through, helping us trust in who and what God created us to be. We have stories of how God has changed us and the way we see the world and others, making us more grateful, more generous, more compassionate. We have stories of how prayers for healing and strength have led to growth in our faith and deeper connection to the community. And we have stories of how God has brought family and church friends around us in times of deep need, in times of loss, in times of suffering and trial. These are our stories of faith.

Collectively and individually, we have quite the tapestry of faith stories. We have endured fiery trials and attacks by the evil one. We have experienced how God protects us, helps us, and makes us fit for service in the kingdom of God. We have walked faithfully, allowing God to restore, empower, strengthen, and establish our faith. And like those 120 believers there that first Pentecost Sunday, each of our stories are unique, like the different languages spoken that day. Each of our stories can “speak” to people in different situations, with different struggles, at different points in their relationship with God. Together our stories have the power to reach out beyond this place, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those in need of love, healing, wholeness, and grace. As we seek to faithfully live as disciples of Jesus Christ in this time and place, may the Spirit be unbound, flowing in and through us as we seek to make disciples of all peoples for the transformation of this world. May it be so for you and for me. Let us pray...



Holy One, light of love, sun of life, blaze of heaven, we turn to you like flowers to the sun to receive your light. Draw near to us and set us afire with your love and with your Spirit. Continue to work in us, drawing us closer to one another as we grow closer to you. Teach us, Lord, that community is not something to run away from but is something to walk towards. We are the lamp and you are the flame; we are the lighthouse and you are the light. Shine in us, until we are pure light, pure love, pure life! You are the river of life abundant. Flow in us so that we may bear your grace, love, peace, mercy, power, forgiveness, and strength to all the world in the name and the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Pentecost brought the Spirit of God into the believers' hearts and lives. How can you be better at listening to and following the Spirit in your life?
- 2) *Pray*. Take a moment to consider or read our stories of faith. Think of someone that you have been praying for. What stories might connect with this person's need(s)?
- 3) *Study*. Read Acts 2:22-41. What words of Peter would have led you to move from non-believer to believer? How can these words be part of your personal story of faith?