

Pentecost – June 4, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church
Pastor Charles Heup

Joel 2:28 - 29 (NIV)

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29) Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Dear Friends in Christ

Last Sunday in our sermon, I spoke about visualizing the Lord's return to heaven. The Ascension account is one of many accounts in the Scriptures that stimulates some amazing pictures in our minds. The Pentecost account is another one of those picture-stimulating accounts. Close your eyes and try to imagine the events of Pentecost as you recall them from our reading earlier in our service. It's midmorning and the disciples are gathered together in a room. Suddenly you hear the mighty sound of the rushing winds – a crowd is drawn toward the place where the disciples were gathered. Can you hear the din in your mind? Do you hear the gasps as what seems to be flames of fire that separate and sit on the heads of the disciples. Perhaps the disciples asked for calm and quiet before the sound of languages from around the world filled the room. Imagine 3000 baptisms in one morning! If your eyes are still closed you can open them. Wouldn't it have been great to be a part of that!

Well in one sense, we are a part of all that – you see

Theme: God still pours out His Spirit on Us

1. Enabling Us to See
2. Enabling Us to Speak

Peter used our text to explain what was happening on that Pentecost Sunday that followed the Lord's Ascension. But our text wasn't just talking about a one-time event. It was talking about an on-going event. God promised to pour out his Spirit on all people.

From our text, it's obvious that people in the OT were well aware of the working the Holy Spirit. Joel's prophecy however speaks of things that were to take place after the coming of the Messiah. His words indicate that things will be different as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people. If you were to read this account in the Hebrew in which Joel wrote, you'd notice that the word Joel used for people was "flesh". The word describes the sinful nature of man. It emphasizes his mortality that he will die because of sin. When it comes to spiritual matters, our flesh counts for nothing. Jesus said: (John 6:63 NIV) **The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.**

That's what Joel was promising – spiritual life and blessings in abundance. On that first Pentecost after Easter the Spirit brought abundant blessings to those who were present. We can count those blessings in terms of the souls who were brought to faith through the proclamation of the word and the sacrament: 3000 believed and were baptized. 3000 saw their sins and their need for a Savior and 3000 saw the resurrected Jesus as their Savior in faith.

The Holy Spirit enables us to see too. Through the Law, we see our sins – sins which caused our Savior to die. Through Gospel, we see our Savior – who took our sins on himself, was punished in our place, and gave us his perfection. The Holy Spirit is the one responsible for giving us the spiritual life that we enjoy. He helps us to see and understand divine mysteries. We could never understand the mystery of our salvation if it were not for the Holy Spirit.

Our text doesn't directly talk about seeing divine mysteries but it does talk about the Spirit enabling old men to dream dreams and young men to see visions. In the Old Testament times, God used dreams and visions to reveal mysteries to his prophets. Only selected individuals were shown these mysteries. The time was coming Joel prophesied when the Holy Spirit would allow all to enjoy a knowledge of these mysteries. All would be prophets.

In a sense, one could describe a prophet as one who sees the mysteries of God and tells the mysteries of God. That's what Peter and the Apostles did on that first Pentecost. They had seen the wonderful works of God who sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. They saw the one who had been crucified after his resurrection. They witnessed his ascension. They believed his promise that he would send the Holy Spirit to remind them of all that he had taught them. They were waiting for the Spirit to empower them to tell what they had seen in keeping with Jesus promise to them. That power was poured out on them in a wonderful fashion as they were enabled by the Spirit to speak in languages they had never learned before.

Although the miracles of Pentecost were never repeated to the same degree, there are similar situations recorded for us in the NT Scriptures. For example in Acts 10 we hear how even Gentiles at the home of Cornelius were blessed with the Spirit given ability to speak in tongues as evidence of the fact that the Lord had intended the Gospel for them too. One must be careful to stress that the gift of speaking in tongues was by no means a universal gift. In fact there are only three such occasions mentioned in the book of Acts: 1) Pentecost Sunday, 2) at the home of Cornelius and 3) while the Apostle Paul was ministering in Corinth to some disciples who had not heard of the Holy Spirit before. The later two situations simply helped to reinforce the truth that the Holy Spirit was being poured out on all people. It's also interesting to note that the Apostle Paul has some very specific comments regarding the speaking of tongues in his letters to the Corinthians. Apparently, they had some mistaken ideas about this gift of the Spirit. One of the more interesting thoughts that Paul shared with them was that **where there are tongues, they will be stilled...** (1 Corinthians 13:8 NIV).

I suppose it's somewhat natural for us to focus in on the gift of tongues which was given to the apostles and others in the book of Acts. But that's not the greatest act of the Holy Spirit recorded for us. His greatest act was the wonderful way in which he used the word and sacrament to bring people to faith. 3000 believers were added to the church in one day alone.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned over 60 times in the book of Acts which records how the Gospel was spread throughout the world following Christ's ascension and how more and more believers throughout the world were added to the Lord's church. It's clear that the book of Acts records to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that the Spirit was poured out on all the Lord's servants. And the work of the Holy Spirit continues to this day as he enables believers to see the wonderful truths of God and to speak of those truths to others. He's at work as he uses baptism to bring faith to a tiny infant and he's at work as he uses his word to teach a little toddler that Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven. He's at work as he comforts the dying believer with the confidence of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He's at work helping people to see – removing their spiritual blindness. And he's at work enabling people to speak about what he has shown them.

Our text really focuses our attention on the fact that young and old will prophecy when the Lord pours out his Spirit on all people. It will help us to understand what Joel is saying, if we keep that main thought in mind.

The words of Joel must have sounded amazing to the Jews of his day. At that time not all the people were prophets. They thought it very strange when the Spirit was poured out on Saul and he began to prophesy. In Numbers 11:29 Moses said: (Numbers 11:29 NIV) **I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"** He spoke those words after Joshua had asked Moses to stop

two men who were prophesying in the camp. Well the very thing that Moses desired is what Joel foretells and what is taking place in the Christian Church today.

The prophets that the Jews were familiar with at times received their messages in visions and dreams. Through these dreams and visions, God gave the prophets deeper insights into his plan of salvation. The ordinary believers didn't have these insights until the prophets shared them with them. For example, no one knew that the Savior would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem until it was revealed by God to the prophets who shared the message with the people. No one understood that the Savior would be a suffering servant until David and Isaiah spoke so clearly of his crucifixion and suffering. In the OT times, God gave his prophets a more complete revelation of himself and his than he granted to others. But now, in what Joel describes as the last days all believers will have a full and complete vision of God's plan of salvation. When we consider what we know about that plan of salvation and compare it to the limited knowledge of the OT believers we can see just how blessed we are. We could even say we have the knowledge of prophets!

Our text raises an interesting question. How will this information come to God's people? Is Joel saying that we should all expect special dreams and visions from God? Well already in the OT times the Lord pointed his people to the Law and the Testimony for their information about God. He wanted them to use the Scriptures the Holy Spirit had inspired the prophets to write. Jesus explained in his parable about the rich man and poor Lazarus that if someone would not believe on the basis of the Word then they would not believe even if they saw a special revelation.

As an Old Testament prophet, Joel speaks in OT terms. His point isn't that we should be expecting dreams and visions – his point is that we will be like the prophets who dreamed dreams and saw visions because we will be given knowledge which had been reserved for a select few in the past.

But some might ask, "Isn't it possible for God to still communicate with people through visions and dreams?" Since all things are possible for God, it is certainly possible for him to do this. But the question really isn't **can** God do this **but** has he indicated that he **will** do it? And there is no place in the Scriptures indicating that God will always speak to people through dreams and visions. God has however assured us that **all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful...so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV) He has also told us that (2 Timothy 3:15) **the holy Scriptures,... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

The Scriptures also warn us to reject the dreams of false prophets. On the basis of what the Scripture teaches about dreams and visions we can safely say that we have no need of them and that if they differ from what the word itself states then they are false and vain.

It's important to have an opportunity for us to discuss these things but in so doing it's easy for us to miss the point the Joel was making. Once again, his point was that the time would come when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all of God's people enabling them to see and to speak. The work of a prophet was not complete after he had received a message from God. God sent Jeremiah to serve as his prophet with the command: **You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you.** So when Joel foresaw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, he not only saw God's people receiving messages from God but he also saw them relaying the messages they had received to others.

That's the basic task of a prophet: telling and teaching; preaching and proclaiming God's Word (for him) to others.

Surely we can see how Joel's prophecy began to be fulfilled on the Pentecost after Easter as the Spirit emboldened and empowered Peter and the other believers to speak God's word (for him) to the peoples from around the globe who were assembled in Jerusalem. And this prophesying is to continue until our Lord's return.

Today the Spirit has been poured out upon us. Through the word and sacrament, he has opened the eyes of believers (**our eyes**) to see what OT prophets and kings longed to see but never saw and to hear what they waited to hear but never heard. That same Spirit also opens the mouths of God's people to speak like prophets of God and to be his witnesses. The spirit does this without respect to race, gender, age, social or economic status. Today God's prophets include men and women, young and old, rich and poor. Little children can joyfully proclaim the birth of Christ in more detail than the prophet Isaiah ever could. Sunday School teachers and Christian Day School teachers (both men and women) share truths about the Savior that even Solomon in all his wisdom did not know. Our own congregation displays some of the diversity Joel spoke about as God's people gather here for worship: to prophesy with praises and prayers the wonderful works of God. Joel said that God's people would prophesy and as the Holy Spirit works wisdom and courage in them; God's people do.

And we do it in our own pulpits – so to speak. Not all have been called to stand before the congregation of believers to serve as I am today – as a pastor. But each of you has been asked in the Scriptures to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have. And so each of us as forgiven sinners, as members of the family of God can declare the praises of God to those we know. The Spirit will bless the message using it to strengthen, encourage and enlarge the Lord's family as he sees fit just as he has promised. Thank God that he still

Pours Out His Spirit On Us

1. Enabling Us to See his wonderful works
2. Enabling Us to Speak about his wonderful works.

Amen.