

MEDITATION
Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: MOSES WISHED IT

Have you ever felt completely overwhelmed? Have you ever considered all the things you have to get done and the people you were responsible for and just felt...overwhelmed? Moms, are you nodding your heads? Some of you might be thinking of times when the homework piled up at school. Others of you may be thinking about numerous projects that sit there half-done. Maybe holidays or big events that you're responsible for come to mind. Maybe it's the job. "How can I possibly do all of this?!" is what you think. Sometimes we cause these situations ourselves and sometimes they are thrust upon us. Sometimes we just don't consider the help others could be to us. But no matter how it happens, we feel overwhelmed. Maybe you've even cried out to God for help in those instances.

Did you know that once upon a time, the great leader of God's people, Moses, felt just like that? And boy, did he cry out to the Lord! Listen to this: **Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."** (Numbers 11:10-15)

Talk about stressed out! Moses could not keep up with the demand and the responsibility. He complained to God (and really about what God had called him to do!). He'd had enough; he was done!

That kind of makes you wonder how God responded doesn't it? You might think that the Lord wouldn't take too kindly to one of his children blaming him for their inability to handle life's responsibilities. That would make sense to us, but instead we find a loving and giving God who reached out to help. And the help he gave came in the form of the Holy Spirit. Listen to what happened after Moses' complaint:

The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone. So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Joshua son of Nun, who had been

Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Moses was freaking out and his prayer to the Lord had an accusatory tone, but the God of all grace provided a solution to his problem. He could not possibly handle the administration of God's nation alone, so God gave him 70 men—elders of the people—to assist him. But it wasn't just manpower that was necessary—it was Spirit-power!

In this account, we hear that the gift of the Holy Spirit was upon Moses. That gift included faith in God, love for God, a servant's heart, and a call to serve others. That measure of the Spirit, that gift, was given to the 70 men who would aid him in leading and serving the Israelites. It was like taking one lit candle and using it to light 70 more with the same flame! At the moment that the Spirit descended on those helpers, they prophesied. There was an immediate demonstration of the Spirit resting upon them. Who knows why Eldad and Medad didn't make it over to the Tent of Meeting, but it didn't matter. The Spirit of the Lord came upon them also and they too demonstrated the Spirit's power as they prophesied where they were in the camp. When word of this got back to Moses, his helper, Joshua, wanted Moses to stop them from doing that. It is then that we hear the wish of Moses: **"I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"** Moses wished for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be upon all of God's people in the measure that it was with him and those elders.

There are several things that you and I might take away from this bit of history. One is that we ought to turn to the Lord when the burdens and stresses of life overwhelm us. We can leave out the sinful, accusatory tone in our prayers to God and instead trust that as the Lord helped his child Moses, he will also help us.

Another is that God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable us to serve God in whatever way he has called us to do that—as a mom or dad, an employer or an employee, as a friend, as a volunteer. The gift of the Spirit is upon us too and can be given in greater measure just like those 70 men found out. That enabled them to serve and the Holy Spirit can do that for us too so that we may be a blessing to our children, our friends and our neighbors—all with a calmer and more faithful heart and mind. It may even be that the Lord will provide us with Spirit-filled friends to ease our burden.

We pray that God will forgive our sinful response to life's stresses and that the Holy Spirit will continue coming to us that all of this might be so.

HYMN

Holy Spirit, Light Divine

Christian Worship #183

MEDITATION

Joel 2:28–29

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: JOEL FORETOLD IT

We don't know precisely when the prophet Joel lived, but it's pretty safe to say that it was at least 500 years after the time of Moses. Joel was one of those people who received the gift of the Spirit in a particular way. In his prophetic writing, he calls God's people to repentance as he assures them that the Day of the Lord will come when he will judge and save his people.

You may remember that long ago, God spoke to his people in dreams, as he did with Joseph, when he showed how Joseph's brothers would one day bow down to him. He also gave certain individuals visions, as he did with Isaiah, who "saw" the sacrifice of God's Son in striking detail and recorded it 700 years before it happened. These gifts of the Holy Spirit came to specific individuals whom God had chosen. When the Holy Spirit came to those 70 elders at Moses' time, Moses wished for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be on all of God's people. Well, the prophet Joel actually foretold that! These are God's words through Joel: **"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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."**

When God through Joel talked about "afterward" and "in those days," he meant "later" and "as the Day of Lord nears." In those later times, the Spirit would be poured out on all of his people. Prophesying, dreams and visions would be gifts of the Spirit to men and women, young and old. We might picture God's people as cups that are partially filled, and God pouring more of his Spirit into them that he might be praised by them and by those who hear them proclaiming salvation in God the Savior.

Though we might usually think of prophesying as telling the future and, most often the work done by God's prophets, it's not that simple. The words for "prophecy" in Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek are used to speak of a person telling a message from God about the future, but also have as a basic meaning, to simply "proclaim" or "deliver a message." You and I, who live in this latter time, this New Testament era, this time between Christ's completed work of redemption and the ever-closer Last Day that Joel foresaw—we proclaim the truth of God.

We share the gospel.

We tell the things God has given to us in Scripture.

We have bountiful access to God's promises and will in those pages and we
proclaim them.

We share Bible stories with our children.

We teach God's truth to those who don't know it.

We speak of God's wishes and his will with each other as we help one another
on the path that leads to heaven.

Some of us, like your pastors, are asked to do that publicly.

Others do that in the name of the church—like Sunday School teachers and
Youth leaders and those helping with evangelism.

In these ways, you and I show that what Joel foretold is actually happening—the gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to us! And this is important work because the grace of God which desires all people to be saved has given us more time to proclaim his Word—the End is not here yet! We have a need to express our love for God and people have a need to hear it, so we want to be about this work of using the gift of the Spirit so that more and more will come to know their Savior. This fulfillment in our time may not seem as dramatic as Joel foretold, but as the Spirit works through us, he changes hearts and lives and the eternal life of souls!

We see Joel's prophecy fulfilled in us and yet there was a particular, dramatic demonstration of the Spirit's gifts that was a direct fulfillment of his prophecy. We'll hear about that after we sing "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest.

HYMN

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest
Christian Worship #177

MEDITATION

Acts 2:1-21

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE DISCIPLES LIVED IT

Like many of you, I can read and hear what war is like—the horrors of it, the bond that develops between those who serve together, the reaction of people to those who have served—but I have never lived it, so I can't understand it the same way as those of you who have served. Dads—guys in general, actually—any mom will tell you that you cannot understand the pain, and even the joy, of childbirth because you've never experienced it. They're right, we haven't lived it. The same is true of the gift of the Spirit given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost—50 days after Jesus' resurrection on Easter. Though we, in part, fulfill Joel's prophecy, we can't know it exactly as the disciples lived it.

Just like every year on the 50th day after Passover, Jews from all over Israel and other countries had gathered in the Holy City to celebrate the Feast of Weeks (7 weeks after Passover), which was also called the Feast of Harvest. This festival required a trip to Jerusalem where the faithful would give praise and offerings to God for the grain harvest. The Greek word for 50 is "Pentecost" so we know this festival by that name also. Every year these events took place. But unlike every year before this, the Spirit of God was unleashed upon the disciples of Jesus Christ who had completed his mission of living a perfect life and giving it as a sacrifice for sin on the cross. He had risen from death and just 10 days prior to this festival, he ascended into heaven, returning to the right hand of God the Father. And then this happened:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Moses wished for the special gift of the Spirit to be upon God's people. The prophet Joel foretold its happening. But the disciples lived it. You heard what happened. The rapid spread of the saving gospel of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus had its beginning on Pentecost as the Spirit came with an uncommon gift for his disciples—the ability to speak in languages they did not know so that the message of salvation in Jesus could be understood by these people who had come in from distant lands. What an amazing gift...for a very specific purpose...at just the right time!

The leader of the disciples, Peter, explained that the sound of a rushing wind, the tongues of fire over their heads, the ability to preach in other languages—all of this was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and the work of the Holy Spirit. It makes sense then, doesn't it, that in Christian art we depict the Holy Spirit as wind or fire (in addition to the image of a dove, which also comes from Scripture)?

The disciples lived the gift of the Spirit as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and the promise of Jesus at his Ascension! Can you imagine them trying to explain that wind sound to you and me? Or just what those tongues of fire looked like? Or what it was like to preach in languages they had never mastered? A person in Jerusalem for the festival probably expected religious proclamations to be made in Hebrew, the holy tongue. But the languages spoken that day probably included Greek, Aramaic, Latin, Parthian and others! *"How did these simple men from up north in Galilee know how to do that,"* the crowd wondered.

You and I, like the people that day, have a keen interest in this most exciting post-Easter event in the history of God's Church. But all of those things mentioned are not the most exciting, most interesting part. Notice the last sentence: **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

Many of you, most of you, know the result of these dramatic events, the result of the fulfillment of the prophecy from Joel: 3,000 believed the saving gospel that was preached and they were baptized! Wind, fire, languages—amazing, interesting—but not as amazing as the straightforward message of law and gospel preached that day and not as amazing as thousands of people trusting in Jesus as their Savior for the first time! How blessed were those men to live the gift of the Holy Spirit as they shared Christ! And how blessed were the thousands to receive faith as the gift of the Holy Spirit!

You and I have that in common with them, you know. We have been given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit working through the Word and in Baptism. The Spirit has also given us other gifts with which to serve our God and the people around us. We have what Moses wished for...and what Joel foretold...and, at least in part, what the disciples lived. We too can share the good news of Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, and ascended—for the salvation of souls. Give thanks today for the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to God's people of all time and given to you for the salvation of souls—yours and those with whom you will share Jesus as the Spirit enables you. Amen.

HYMN

O, Holy Spirit, Enter In
Christian Worship #184