

I Will Pour Out My Spirit Upon You **Acts 2:1–21**

As many of you know, my wife, Juhee, has a lot of energy. Some of Haven church members call her the “Energizer Bunny.” They say they have never seen her simply walk. She is always moving and running. Juhee also works very hard, starting something new, always finding a way where there seems to be no way. So I gave her a nickname: “Way Maker.” And there are many good things about living with a “way maker.” But there are also some challenges. Do you know what one of them is? She opens doors, but she does not always close them. When she goes out to the backyard and comes back in, the door stays open. When she comes into the house behind me, somehow the door stays open. She is very good at opening doors. I am very good at closing them.

One time, she was watching a Korean drama called Mr. Sunshine. There is a line in the drama where the main character says something like, “I want to live like a flame—to burn warmly and brightly, and then fade away.” Juhee really liked that line. So she said, “I want to live like that too. I want to joyfully do God’s work with all my heart, and then go like a flame.” So I told her, “Yes, you are someone who lights a lamp in a dark world.”

And again, there are many good things about living with someone who wants to live like a flame. But there are also some challenges. Do you know what one of them is? She does not always turn off the lights. The bathroom light, the kitchen light, the hallway light—somehow they are often still on. So she lights the world, and I turn off the lights.

But in a way, all of us are called to live like that. Not to leave the kitchen light on, of course. But to live as people whose lives are lit by the fire of God—to live with warmth, love, courage, and holy energy, and to carry the flame of God’s Spirit into the world.

When you think about a burning flame, what comes to mind? Heat. Movement. Energy. Power. Life. That is how the book of Acts describes the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes like the sound of a rushing wind. The Spirit comes like tongues of fire resting on each person. The scene is vivid. It is powerful. It is almost wild.

Maybe because this story is so dramatic, many people hear words like “the presence of the Holy Spirit” or “being filled with the Spirit,” and immediately think of something mysterious, emotional, charismatic, or unusual. So for people like us—people who are often calm, thoughtful, and perhaps a little reserved—“being filled with the Holy Spirit” may sound like something that belongs to other Christians. Maybe Pentecostal Christians. Maybe very emotional Christians. Maybe people who pray loudly and raise their hands very high. But not us. And yet, the coming of the Holy Spirit is not just something that happened once in the past. It is not only for a certain kind of Christian. The Holy Spirit is God’s living presence at work among us now. The Spirit still comes. The Spirit still moves. The Spirit still teaches God’s people to dream again.

Wonder and Awakening

In today’s scripture, the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem. They are waiting, just as Jesus told them to wait. Imagine that our church is the upper room and we are the people gathered there. And imagine that today is the first Pentecost.

Suddenly, there is a sound from heaven like the rush of a violent wind. It fills the whole church. Then something like divided tongues of fire appears, and the fire rests on each person. How would you feel? Surprised? Confused? A little scared? Amazed?

And then, suddenly, Frank begins speaking fluent Korean. Alice begins speaking Hindi. Kerri begins speaking German. And I begin speaking Russian fluently. If you saw that, what would you think? I think I would say, “What in the world is going on?” But in that moment, we would also be standing before wonder—something we could not explain, something bigger than our logic, bigger than our expectations. And when we encounter wonder, something happens to us. We begin to pay attention. Wonder is not simply being confused or amazed. Wonder gives us a kind of holy pull. It draws our attention toward something we might otherwise miss.

The Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel called this “radical amazement.” For Heschel, wonder opens us beyond the small circle of the self. It helps us see others. It helps us see the world. It helps us see God. And we need that, don’t we?

Even though we are people of faith, we can easily become numb to the presence of God. Life gets crowded with bills, health concerns, family worries, the future, the news, responsibilities, and fears. All of these things can fill our hearts so completely that we cannot see beyond them. We become trapped in the small room of “me”: my problems, my worries, my plans, my limitations, my survival. And when we are trapped there, it becomes hard to sense the movement of God.

But then the Holy Spirit comes to us. The Spirit knocks on the door of our hearts and says, “Open your eyes. I am still at work. Pay attention.” Sometimes the Spirit wakes us through something surprising. Sometimes the Spirit wakes us through the wonder of ordinary life. Sometimes the Spirit wakes us through a quiet nudge—a conversation, a prayer, a moment of beauty, a person in need, a small act of kindness. And when the Spirit nudges us, we need to pay attention.

Prophecy and Dreaming

The disciples experienced that same awakening. The wonder of the Holy Spirit drew them out of fear and into the larger world of God’s purpose. And what is the first thing they do after the Spirit comes? Peter stands up and begins to speak. He begins to proclaim the word of God. He begins to prophesy.

Now, when we hear the word “prophecy,” we often think of predicting the future. Or we may imagine someone shouting angrily at people, condemning them, judging them, warning them. But in Scripture, prophecy is not mainly about predicting tomorrow. It is about helping people see what is truly real, what truly matters, and where God is present now.

That is important, because there are so many things that try to steal our attention from God. Just watch the news for a few minutes, and you may feel like the world is coming to an end. We see lies. We see injustice. We see leaders who manipulate fear. We see suffering that feels too large to fix. And sometimes we become angry, discouraged, and helpless.

Last month, Joan White told me, “When I watch the news, it is just so depressing.” So I told her, “Go home and read Psalm 58 in *The Message* translation. It might make you feel better.” Now, Psalm 58 is not exactly a calm and polite prayer. It is a very honest psalm. It gives voice to anger against injustice and corrupt power. It gives us permission to bring our frustration honestly before God. The next Sunday, Joan came to me with a smile and said, “You got me!” So, if the news makes you angry these days, maybe you should go home and read Psalm 58 too.

What I want to say is this: when the darkness of the world tries to distract us, when our fear and frustration try to take over our hearts, when despair tries to convince us that nothing can change, it is a prophetic act to say, “Look. God is still here. God is still working. God is not finished with us. God’s love is still moving in the world.” To turn our attention back to the living

God—that is prophecy. To bear witness to the God we have experienced—that is prophecy. We are the prophets.

Peter stands up and quotes the prophet Joel: “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.”

This is an amazing promise. God does not say, “I will pour out my Spirit only on a few qualified people.” God does not say, “I will pour out my Spirit only on those who have a Master of Divinity or a Ph.D. in theology.” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” All flesh. Young and old. Men and women. Those who feel ready and those who do not. Those with strong faith and those with trembling faith. That means you. That means me. That means us.

And what happens when the Spirit is poured out? “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” Children, who are often seen as immature or not yet ready, become truth-tellers in the Spirit. Young people, who often feel trapped by anxiety about the future, survival, success, achievement, and pressure, begin to see visions larger than the world’s expectations. And then comes the part that feels especially important: “Your old men shall dream dreams.” When people grow older, when the body becomes weaker, when life has brought many disappointments, it is easy to stop expecting anything new. It is easy to say, “My part is over. My best days are behind me. There is nothing new for me now.”

It is also easy for a church to feel that way. When a church becomes smaller, we may begin to think, “There is not much we can do anymore.” When a church moves into survival mode, we may begin to put financial stability ahead of God’s calling. When we become older and more tired, we may begin to say, “Our church cannot grow again. Our church cannot do anything new. This is as far as we can go.”

But Pentecost says something different. God says, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” And when the Spirit comes, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” My beloved Asbury family, on this Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit is still doing this among us. Because of past disappointments, painful experiences, injustice in society, and our own sense of helplessness, we may close the doors of our hearts and say, “What can I do? It is too late. Nothing will change.”

But the Spirit comes to us. The Spirit gently opens the locked doors of our hearts and says, “I have poured out my Spirit upon you. You can begin again. You can dream again. You can love again. You can step into God’s larger world again.”

So, my friends, let us listen to the voice of the Spirit. Let us not give up. We are not people of despair. We are people of the Spirit. We are not people who simply look back at what used to be. We are people who dream forward with God.

When the Spirit comes, closed doors open. When the Spirit comes, dying embers become flames again. When the Spirit comes, tired hearts begin to dream again. So may we step beyond the small room of fear. May we enter the wide world of God’s grace. May we make a way of love. May we live like flames of God’s Spirit—bringing warmth, light, courage, and hope into this world. Amen.