

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. (Joel 2:28-29)(NIV 84 and 2011 are identical)

How are these Days Special?

Summer is a special time. Most of us have started our summer already or we will in just a few days when the kids get out of school. That's part of what makes summer such a wonderful time in my memory. One day without school folding into the next. But that's not all. Warm weather. Green grass. Taking a family vacation and breaking away from the rut and the routine. Summer is a wonderful, special time. I wait all winter for it to come. Today is the beginning of a different season of the year: Pentecost. Now, Pentecost is more than just another church holiday with a funny name. The day of Pentecost was the beginning of a new age, a time when special things happened and still happen. These are days that God's people waited 1500 years to see. Now, maybe when you look around your church you don't see anything special or different. Maybe you even wonder what they were waiting for. **How are these days special?**

I.

All believers have the Holy Spirit. That might seem fairly obvious, but it's such an important point that God predicted it more than 800 years before it came true. When he looked forward to the times that the first Pentecost would usher in, he called this era simply "afterward" and spoke of things that would be true "in those days." Joel didn't know when "those days" would be. He only knew it lay in the future – "afterward."

What would happen? God would pour out his Holy Spirit on the Christian Church. From that day forward, everywhere the Church went, the Spirit would be there. Joel says, **"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."** Now, doesn't Joel say "all people"? He does. But he makes it clear that he means all people inside God's church when he says, "Even on my servants ... I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

As we heard a few minutes ago, Acts chapter 2 tells us that God was talking about the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. "Those days" began on that day, almost two thousand years ago, and they have continued afterward. God promised a new era that would come. In that era, God would give his Spirit to all his people. It began with the visible miracle, the rushing of a mighty wind and the appearance of tongues of fire on the heads of the apostles. Then came another visible miracle: the apostles proclaimed the gospel in a dozen or more languages they had never learned. But that wasn't the ending of the miracle. It continued everywhere the gospel was proclaimed. To this day, every time we hear about Jesus, God does the hidden part of this miracle. He doesn't send the sound of a mighty wind or cause fire to appear above our heads. He doesn't even give us miraculous abilities like healing or speaking in tongues. But the Holy Spirit always comes in his gospel.

And he always works. Joel spoke about dreams and visions and prophecy. What part of that was fulfilled on the very day of Pentecost? Not dreams and visions. Only the prophecy, the preaching. But for that to happen, God had to take these fishermen who had followed Jesus and stumbled over his words again and again and he had to transform them into the servants he wanted them to be. He had to make them different than they were. He had to give them gifts to fulfill their roles in his Church. And God does that for us, too. It's not always as dramatic as it seemed on that day. It rarely looks like a miracle. But none of us could do our part in God's work without the Holy Spirit coming to us and changing us.

Do you have the Holy Spirit? Do you have the gifts you need to serve God? How would you know if you did? We sinful human beings simply cannot do the work of the Lord on our own. We need the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and make us different. Even when he does, we have an enormous ability to destroy the work we're supposed to be doing. But from that reality come twin dangers to our work. The first one is to

believe that we just can't do anything. "The pastor went to the seminary. The teachers are trained to teach and to understand the Bible. I never had that training. I don't know enough about it. I would just mess it up." Guess what? We pastors and teachers mess things up all the time. We're sinners. But God doesn't accept that excuse. All too often, it is just an excuse for laziness. We don't want to do more. We don't want to find out what it would take to serve the Lord. Every year, we have to beg for people to fill offices in this church. You can give all kinds of excuses for why you're not the person to do that work. But then what work are you doing? Not everyone needs to serve on a board or a committee. But we all have the Holy Spirit. God gives each and every one of us gifts to do his work. Are we using them?

The other danger we face is thinking that we should feel led to this or that ministry. We should see visions or have dreams – isn't that what Joel spoke about? But again, that's not what happened on the day of Pentecost. The situation reminds me of a story someone told me earlier this week. His daughter was taking driver's ed and she was out on the road practicing with her instructor. They came to a worker holding a sign that said, "Survey Crew Ahead." After she carefully pulled around the man and the work crew, she drove on. After a few minutes, she asked the driving instructor, "What kind of questions do you think they're going to ask us?" She misunderstood the message on the sign. Don't make the same mistake with Joel's words. When God said that his people would see visions and dream dreams and prophesy, he was giving examples of the work the Holy Spirit would do. But those examples don't come close to all the gifts he gives. They are just representative gifts – and none but prophesy was evident on the day of Pentecost.

God is working in your life through the gospel. He is giving you gifts. Your sinful flesh doesn't want to believe it. Or it wants to find those gifts in some kind of charismatic or emotional experience. But God works much more simply than that. He works through hearing the message about Jesus. It's only our hard headed and hard hearted sinful nature that thinks differently. It's only the unbeliever in our hearts that thinks we can come up with a better way for the Spirit to work. That's just pride and sin. It's unworthy of the people of God. Why would the Holy Spirit ever give gifts to people who think like that?

Because he loves us. And because Jesus has taken that pride and sin away, now and forever. The only perfect heart that the Holy Spirit ever worked in was his. Then Jesus went forward and did the work God called him to do. He served and preached and above all else, he died for you and for me. He paid for our pride and sin, for our refusal to see God in the gospel and our insistence on finding him in our feelings or our experiences or anywhere but where God says he will be. Jesus died and paid because we just don't listen to God. He swept all that sin away. When he rose, God called us holy and perfect. When Jesus sent the gospel to us, he gave us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit created a believer inside us who does follow him. Every time we hear that good news of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit comes to us again. He keeps on building us up. He keeps on giving us the gifts we need to do his work. Every one of us has that Spirit. Every one of us is gifted to serve in God's Church.

II.

Joel foretold a fundamental change in the way God was going to do his work. In Joel's day – in the Old Testament – the work of the church was limited to one tribe of Israel: the Levites. The priests all came from that tribe. Only that tribe could work in the tabernacle or the temple. Jews from other tribes could only contribute their offerings. They couldn't do the actual work. But the Holy Spirit showed Joel a day when all that would change, a day when God would invite and even demand that all his people have a hand in the work of the gospel. We live in that day. **How are these days special? All believers proclaim God's Word.**

That's what Joel means by the word "prophesy" when he says, "**Your sons and daughters will prophesy.**" Prophesy in the Bible means to proclaim God's Word. And notice, he does say "Your sons and daughters will prophesy." There's a huge debate going on in Bible believing churches about what's called "inclusive language." It's adding "and women" to places where the Bible says "men." There was example of that in the Acts reading today. The translation on the right hand side changed verse 15 from "These *men* are not drunk" to "These *people* are not drunk." It's a very involved and heated debate. It does not apply in Joel chapter 2. In the Hebrew, God says, "Your sons *and daughters* will prophesy." Many times, God simply says "sons" and means "children," both male and female. But here, he underlines the involvement of women.

Why? Because the Word of God does not just belong to pastors and teachers. It belongs to the entire people of God. Now, in Joel's day, very few women served like our teachers do, in the public ministry. Certainly, Joel foresaw situations in which they could serve. But these verses go beyond the work that the

apostles did themselves, beyond the work that called pastors and teachers do, to the work of the entire church. God gave his Word to every single one of us. All of us proclaim it. We proclaim it to our children, our closest mission field. We proclaim it to our neighbors and co-workers. We proclaim it in all the situations which God creates so that people hear about Jesus and come to him. That was the key event of the first Pentecost: proclaiming Christ crucified and risen. And the Holy Spirit worked through the proclamation. After coming on the apostles in power, he came to the hearts of 3000 people through the gospel and they believed. And that was the more dramatic miracle!

Do we proclaim that gospel? Do we care about that outreach ministry? I had a very troubling conversation earlier this week with a pastor who is concerned about whether we truly care about outreach in our church body. He pointed to how much time and effort we put into a variety of things and how little time and effort we put into reaching out with the gospel. Is that true about us here at Peace? I would like to believe that it isn't. I would like to believe that you do talk about your Savior, you do let your light of faith shine in your lives, in a natural way, day by day. I believe that because that's what believers do. But as you examine your life, which pastor is closer to describing you? The one who feels we don't care about this enough or the one who hopes it's happening?

Only you can answer that question. Only you can say if you faithfully teach your children the word. Only you know if you read the word and share the word – only you and God. But if you don't, why not? It can't be because you don't have the Spirit. God poured the Spirit out on all believers. The only answer would be because we sinners are lazy and scared and unfaithful. If we're honest, don't we all have to admit that's true? Don't we all have to admit that it's hard to inject Christ into a conversation? Don't we all have to admit that there's a part of us that just doesn't want to do that work? That's the unbeliever inside us. Because of his sin, we deserve death and hell.

But that's why Jesus died and rose. That message not only sets us free from death and hell, it is the only thing in this life that can set us free from fear and laziness and unfaithfulness because that message alone gives us the Holy Spirit. Jesus has erased your laziness and your fear and your unfaithfulness from God's records. So God still loves you. Isn't that a message you want to share? God has given that message to you. Commit yourself to sharing it with your children, with your friends and family, and with the world.

These are wonderful days in which we live – believe or not, that's true! We live in the summer of God's Word. We live in the age when Christ has poured the Holy Spirit out on us, the people of God. We live in an age when we have the Word and through that Word, we have the power and the gifts to serve. Be faithful in using that Word and those gifts. Amen.