

Let us pray: Loving God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, I pray that you would be with us this morning. We have heard the witness of Scripture, of your empowering of the disciples as they waited in that room. Pour out the Spirit on us today, Lord. We know some of the needs of our lives, and of our world. You know even more. Open our hearts and our minds, and may our lives be filled with the flame of your message: with love at great cost, with peace that surpasses understanding, and with joy everlasting. Amen.

From our reading from Acts: "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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

"This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel" says Peter. This is a message taken from the Old Testament, a prophetic message of truth, telling us who God is, words that are lifted out of Joel and brought to new light in the events of Pentecost. God's spirit fills all the people.

But in the Old Testament times when this message was first spoken, this would have been a surprising idea. In those days, there was a group set apart to intercede for the people, to be the contact between God and the rest of the people. This was the Levites, the holy tribe of Israel, and the descendants of Levi, the third son of Jacob, also known as Israel himself. They were set apart by blood, from birth, members of the tribe for a special reason, set apart to perform the spiritual work of the entire community because of their family name: Levite.

But there is no-one set apart on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit appears to all of those who were gathered in that room. "There came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where

they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” There is no distinction based on blood, no lineage requirements. There isn’t even a profession of faith, a divine question and answer. They weren’t asked:

“Do you desire, in dependence on this Holy Spirit,
to mature as a Christian in the church,
to seek the guidance of Christ as you listen for his Word,
to celebrate his death and life at the table he provides,
and to engage in his mission to the world?”

The Spirit came to them all, and they all began to witness to the Gospel. They all took up the charge of ministry, unlike the people of Israel, who left it to the Levites. And even among the varied and diverse people of Jerusalem who were outside listening on that Pentecostal day, they all heard the disciples speaking their own languages. Even the people from miles and miles away. The witness, the stories of God's deeds of power, comes to all of them through the Spirit. All of them.

We also heard in our readings today the story from Numbers, of the Spirit resting on the seventy elders of Israel, including the two in the camp. And Moses says “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them!” On the day of Pentecost, that’s exactly what happens.

In many ways, we can think of Pentecost as the anniversary of our church. We believe that the Spirit has come to all of us here today, that the events of that day marked the beginning of something new, something big. The spirit was no longer for the select few, but poured out on all the people: a priesthood of all believers, not just the few, not just because of our blood.

This is what we know about God's character: God is with us all, God gives strength to all, forgiveness to all. That is one of the messages that we proclaimed in Rory's baptism this morning: Even though Rory is just a baby, he is not barred from receiving the sign of the spirit. God's spirit comes to all. We don't baptize into this church only if you are from a St. David's bloodline, and I didn't ask Rory a single question before I baptised him, because God's Spirit is not mine to withhold. The Spirit comes to us all.

But there were questions that I asked. Questions to Erin and John, and questions to the rest of the congregation. I asked if you would promise to guide and nurture Rory, by word and deed, with love and in prayer, encouraging him to follow the way of Christ and to be a faithful member of his church?

And you all gave your word that you would. I asked these questions because the Spirit has come to you, and once the Spirit comes to you, it means there is no-one to do your work for you. Unlike the Israelites, who had the Levites, a group set apart as the intermediates to "look after things". Unlike Moses' seventy elders, because the Spirit had come only to them. Now, the Spirit has come to you. The Spirit comes to us all, and, if you'll forgive me for using a cliched line from a superhero movie: "With great power comes great responsibility". It would be nice if we could say that nurturing Rory's faith was the responsibility of the Sunday school teachers, it would be easier for us and it would be easier for Erin and John, but that isn't what we accepted today, it wasn't only the teachers who stood

up to make promises about the curriculum they would be offering for Rory. We have, all of us, taken up the responsibility together.

There are many commands in Scripture for us: Love your enemies. Feed the hungry, visit the lonely and the sick, sacrifice yourself for the sake of others. It would be easier in all of these cases if the Spirit came only to a few, if these commands were for a few, the responsibility of the Levites. But the Spirit has come to us all, and so we all take up this mission together.

But as I say this, I'm aware of the potential for irony: I'm the one standing at the front, wearing a big ol' robe and a stole. I'm the one with an office right over there, and I'm the one who speaks every week, who prays over our offerings. I'm the one who baptizes, and who listens in confidence. In our church, we do believe that training ministers is valuable. But don't confuse Sunday morning with the work of the church. This service may be my responsibility, but I am no Levite. I am the only one who didn't make any promises during the baptism! I'm very glad that I'm not responsible for all the work of this church, because there is a lot that gets done without my even knowing how it happens, and if it was up to me, I'd never figure it out. We have dozens of groups able to meet in our space throughout the week, often a surprise to me. I hear about people who are ill, only because of the many visits that they receive from caring, spirit-filled members of this congregation. I say a welcome this morning, but the real welcome always comes from the warmth and the love that this congregation shares over a cup of tea or coffee after the service.

So receive the Holy Spirit. Know that the Spirit comes to everyone: to the unprepared, to the uncertain, the doubters and the unworthy. No-one is left out of God's plan to bring light and warmth into this world, you can be a part of what God has planned. But know also that the Spirit has come to

you, it is yours to contribute, to bring God's light into the world. This is not a job to leave to others.

So, I know that Diana is looking for volunteers to help with the VBS program, and with Sunday school on an occasional basis. I know that the choir would love to have people. I know that Bridges to Hope is always looking for food, and for volunteers, and it may surprise you to hear that the board assures me we can always use more money and more volunteers for any of our activities. Your hard work and generosity are appreciated, and are working to build the Kingdom of God in the world today. Most important of all though, know that this is your church, the Spirit is in you. If you have ministries that you want to see grow, or any you want to see begin, please give me a call, or stop by for a visit. I would love to dream dreams with you, to see the visions of where you feel we could shine the light of Christ in our community.

Think about these things, and take courage from the knowledge that the Spirit of power and of love will be with you all your days. The spirit of joy and peace can make its home even in your heart. The spirit of new life is even now at work in all of us. Hallelujah, Amen.