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The story Allan shared from Acts is the story of Pentecost. It is the story of the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles, allowing them to speak in languages they didn't know. It is the story of the beginning of a church — an expression of faith that cannot be contained by national borders or language or walls.

It is the story of God starting something new and beautiful and wondrous, and starting it with a people who had only days before been lost and confused. It is the story of the inbreaking of God. A story that happens over and over again in every time and in every land where people are willing to let God be God.

But it is not necessarily a new story for the apostles. Something very similar happens all the way back in the book of Numbers. While the Israelites are in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt, they get into the wilderness and begin to challenge the leadership of Moses. They're always challenging Moses in one way or another, but this time it has to do with the lack of a varied diet.

So we know about manna from heaven, right? The Israelites are in the wilderness and they receive manna from heaven to eat. They collect the manna, and they have manna for breakfast and they have manna for lunch and they have manna for dinner. You know what they had for midnight snack? They had manna.

So the Israelites come to Moses and they complain about all this manna, and they start to say, "You know, things were better in Egypt. We may have been slaves, but at least we had meat and fish and cucumbers and melons. We didn't just have manna for every meal."

They bring these complaints to Moses, and I don't know what they expected Moses to do about it. But Moses goes to God. Moses goes to God. More than bringing the complaints of the Israelites, Moses goes to God with the heaviness of leadership. Moses goes to God with that worn-out spirit that comes from carrying a heavy burden for too long.

And God instructs Moses to gather together seventy leaders from the Israelite people — to gather them in the tent so that the spirit of God may be placed upon them. Seventy leaders who will carry the burden, if only for a short time.

So Moses gathers these leaders together. God pours God's spirit upon them — only to learn that two of the seventy never made it into the tent. Two of the seventy are still out with the rest of the Israelites. And God's spirit is poured upon those two as well. And they begin to prophesy to all the people of Israel.

Joshua, who had become one of Moses's chief assistants, was very perturbed. He is perturbed that these two leaders are out in the camp prophesying. He goes to Moses and tells him, "You've got to put a stop to it. You can't just let these two out there prophesying to whoever will hear it. You've got to stop them."

And Moses responds with what I think are some of the most beautiful words recorded in the book of Numbers. Moses replies: *"If only. If only all the Lord's people were prophets, with the Lord placing his spirit upon them."*

A thousand years before the miracle of Pentecost in Jerusalem, Moses is dreaming of a day when everyone will receive a portion of the spirit of God. Everyone will receive the gift of God's spirit.

You see, that's what Pentecost is all about. Pentecost is all about human beings discovering that God is not stingy with the gift of the spirit. It is not poured out with caution on a few. It is poured out on all with great abundance — so much abundance that it begins to seem reckless, as if God is out of control with the gift of the spirit.

But did you hear — did you hear in both of our stories this morning, the story from Acts and the story from Numbers — did you hear the voices of caution and concern? The voices that tell us, "Hold back a little bit."

In the book of Acts, the voice comes anonymously from the crowd, saying the apostles must just be drunk on new wine. I've got to tell you, if wine were the key to me speaking a foreign language, my Spanish professors would have been a lot happier with me.

In the book of Numbers, the voice comes from Joshua — a great leader of the Israelites — who comes to Moses, very concerned that two leaders are out in the community prophesying, and essentially says, "You've got to stop them. The people can't listen to them because they're not following the proper protocol for prophecy."

In his commentary on the book of Numbers, Thomas Dozeman makes a really interesting point that I want to share. He makes the point that the Israelites always seemed to want to lift up powerful and charismatic leaders, but they never wanted to deal with how unpredictable leaders like that could be.

I wonder if we might see the same thing unfold in the modern church today. We want strong leaders. We want committed volunteers. We want passionate Christ followers. We want new and young voices. But we also don't want anything to change. We want to make sure things stay comfortable. We want to make sure things stay the same.

I wonder how many Joshuas we have in the Christian church today.

Sixteen years ago, Elaine Heath — an elder in the United Methodist Church and a former dean of Duke Divinity School — was sharing a revelation that she had. She shared that it was the *neighborhood*, rather than the big brick building with the cross and flame on it, where we as Christians are being sent to be the church. She writes: "*The neighborhood is my parish. Whether my neighbors become Methodists or not, what matters is that they experience the kingdom of God coming near, and that they know it is a kingdom of love.*"

I think about that. I think about how much effort we put into protecting the church — whether that is the building, our doctrines, or our policies. I think about how much effort we put into maintaining ourselves. How often have we been just like Joshua, making sure that the presence of God can be felt in these sacred spaces rather than in the whole of the world?

It was the *neighborhood* that received the blessing on Pentecost. Did you hear that in the reading this morning? It wasn't the church that received the blessing — it was the neighborhood. The church received the burden. The church was given the work to do. But it was the neighborhood that was being blessed.

It was the neighborhood that was receiving the good news that day. It was the neighborhood that was blessed by Peter's words. It was the neighborhood that was learning about the love of God. All those strangely named places that Allan shared with us — it was the neighborhood gathered together that was receiving God that day.

What Pentecost shows us, I think, is what a church without fear or worry might look like. A church that is ready to let God be poured out upon all people.

You see, there was no Pentecost planning committee. There was no Pentecost study group. There was no Pentecost doctrinal team to make sure only the right people were hearing from Peter that day. On Pentecost, the apostles simply allowed God to happen.

What a scary thing. What a scary thing to just let God happen. We know Joshua — Joshua is someone of great faith, a leader amongst the Jewish people — and he was afraid to let God happen in the community. We know it can be a frightening thing to let God happen. But it can also be this amazing thing, when we let God just be God.

In the book of Numbers, Moses has this prophetic hope that all people will have the spirit poured upon them. Now, I will not pretend to know why that couldn't be a reality during the Exodus. I don't know why God could not simply pour God's spirit upon all people at that time. But I hear in the words of Moses that prophetic hope — that one day, God's spirit will be felt abundantly.

And then I hear in Peter's sermon, in his proclamation, his acknowledgment that all the barriers of separation — all the barriers that keep people from belonging — all of them are crumbling away. He proclaims that there is no longer separation between young and old. All will receive the spirit of God. He proclaims that there will no longer be separation between gender identities. All will receive the spirit of God. And in that proclamation, we realize that no status or origin or any other boundary we might place in this world will get between the neighborhood and the spirit of God. God is being poured out with abundance.

Peter's sermon is this grand invitation: everyone belongs to what God is doing. All are welcome. All are included. All are part of the work that the Holy Spirit is up to in the world. It is a beautiful invitation to inclusion.

And yet I fear that the words Peter preached so long ago have fallen on deaf ears in the church. The church has a job — to take Moses's hope and Peter's sermon and make them a reality in our neighborhoods and amongst our neighbors. That's what Pentecost invites us to: to hear those words of Moses and Peter as the invitation to let God be God. To let the Holy Spirit pour forth on all people. To tear down the barriers that we have set up. To stop drawing the circle of inclusion smaller, and instead begin to say that everyone has been invited and included in the wonder that God is accomplishing in our world.

Over the past twenty-five years, forty million Americans have left their religious community. Let me just break that statistic down for you a little bit. Forty million Americans who once attended a religious service at least once a month now no longer attend even once a year. That doesn't include people who only come for Christmas and Easter. These are people who once had a committed religious community — and now don't even show up once a year.

Let me share the voices of just a few of those who have left.

"I was raised Catholic and went to church every Sunday, but as an adult I have not gone. I actually don't even really go on holidays anymore. I think the reason for that is that the views of the church on things like divorce, same-sex marriage, and abortion just don't align with my views."

"We were raised Catholic. In our forties, we had a falling out with the local church because sermons were becoming very political, especially about abortion. And that just really irritated us. That's not why we go to church."

"I grew up going to a Protestant church every week. I taught Sunday school. I sang in the choir. I was even a church organist for a couple of years. I stopped going to church in my thirties because they hurt me deeply. I got postpartum psychosis after the birth of my

second child, and the pastor of the church we were attending accused me of being possessed by a demon."

"I grew up in a Free Will Baptist church and noticed very early that they didn't practice what they were preaching. We had people who were obsessed with homosexuality and condemning that, while brushing their own sexual and physical abuse of their spouse under the rug. We had church elders who could not afford their medications, and as a congregation we ignored it. But man, we sure could raise money for some decorative grass for outside the church. That was their important thing."

"I was raised Catholic, and I was very aware of how invisible women were to the church. I was becoming very aware of how women are treated as second-class citizens."

"More recently, we stopped attending. What really drove my decision was seeing the way that Christians reacted to Donald Trump. I was very disheartened to see people put him on a pedestal and create an idol out of him. Christians are not supposed to have idols, of course. And it especially bothered me that so many of them did not see the hypocrisy in that. 'You're going to hell for this. You need to repent for that.' I just don't feel that that is the Jesus I know. It's not the God that I know. It's not the Christianity that I was raised in. And honestly, I would love to go back to church. I would love to be able to go and learn the gospel from a thoughtful perspective. I'm just not finding it."

Those are stories of people who left the church because they were hurt by the church. But what the statistics actually show us is that only about a quarter of the people who leave the church leave because they've been harmed by it. The vast majority of people who have left the church have left because their schedules changed. Life got in the way. Their family priorities were different from the schedules of the church.

And what that tells me is that the church's greatest failure perhaps is not in our theology — but maybe the greatest failure is our unwillingness to meet people where they are.

So often, the church has asked people to come into the building, to come and worship. But the invitation — the invitation of Pentecost — is not to come in. The invitation of Pentecost is that we pour out into the neighborhoods, into the communities, into the lives of our neighbors.

I wonder if maybe we lost forty million people because we were so desperate to hold the spirit in that we forgot: on Pentecost, the spirit was poured out — and poured out seemingly recklessly.

The church is not called to protect itself. Joshua tried that at Taberah. And Moses said, *"If only. If only all people. If only everyone would be prophets."*

The church is not called to protect itself. The church is called to be present with our neighbors. The church is called to proclaim the love of God. The church is called to be the embodiment of love — within our walls, but more importantly, out among our neighbors.

That is our Pentecost invitation today: to dream with Moses, and with Peter, and with the power of the Holy Spirit within us — a dream of how the church might be poured out, just as God was poured out upon us.

CLOSING PRAYER

Friends, let us take a moment and pray.

Holy God, we have been recipients of a mighty gift — the gift of your Holy Spirit, the companion on this journey we call life, the dwelling of God in our midst.

Remind us, O holy God, not to confine your spirit. Not to draw boundaries around where your spirit can and cannot go. Help us to experience God in holy spaces — and to extend those holy spaces to all our neighbors.

In Christ I pray. Amen.