

Enter the Spirit
Luke 11:5-13
Acts 2:1-11

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Luke 11:5-13

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Acts 2:1-11

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven 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. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Jesus promised his disciples that, after he ascended to Heaven, he would send them the gift of something called the *Paraclete*, or Helper. He never really explained to them, that we know of, what that would be. The implication was that, whatever the *Paraclete* was, they would know it when they saw it.

The disciples, (and this is more than the eleven named Apostles. This is all the remaining followers of Jesus). The disciples all stayed in Jerusalem until Pentecost, which is the Jewish

festival of the wheat harvest, fifty days after the Passover.¹ A great wind went through the room, and it looked like fire appeared in the air above each of their heads. They became filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability.

The passage that I read goes on to list all the places that the thousands of people in Jerusalem for the festival were from. They were from all over the Eastern part of the Roman world.²

The various followers of Jesus, between them, spoke the languages of all of these people, and communicated the good news of Jesus Christ to them in the way that these people could understand. The story goes on as Peter preaches one of the more successful evangelistic sermons of all time. Three thousand people were baptized after this sermon, and the Church had to scramble to teach them all what it meant to follow Jesus.

The *Paraclete*, or the Holy Spirit, had come into the world and into the Church. The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Trinity. God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are all God, but none is identical with the other.

The Holy Spirit acts on us human beings and through us human beings, to do God's amazing work in the world. If we are blessed and we pay attention, we get to be part of that.

The Holy Spirit has always been part of God's work getting done in the world. In the beginning, God created Heaven and Earth out of nothing, and all three persons of the Trinity were involved. God created human beings in God's own image, always in constant loving

¹ For more information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shavuot>

² Parthians, Medes, and Elamites are all from modern-day Iran. Mesopotamia is roughly modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria. Judea is modern-day Israel, mostly. Cappadocia, Pontus, and "Asia" are all in modern-day Turkey, and so are Phrygia and Pamphylia. Egypt and Libya are, well, Egypt and Libya, and Cyrene was a city in Libya. Cretans, in this case, refers to people from the island of Crete, in the Mediterranean Sea. Arabs are people from the Arabian Peninsula.

relationship with God and with one another. When the first human being was created, God breathed the Holy Spirit, or the *ruach Elohim*, into dirt, and Adam was created.

When God sent prophets to bring God's people back to the relationships with God and each other that God had always intended, it was the Holy Spirit that called these very ordinary people and gave them the courage and the power to do amazing things.

When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven as a dove. It was then that Jesus began his ministry, God's work in the world at that moment.

On that first Christian Pentecost day, God's work in the world was to spread the news of Jesus far and wide, among Jews and Gentiles alike. That required bold evangelists of God's good news. Sophisticated world travelers, real speak-truth-to-power types. What the Spirit had to work with was a bunch of frightened people, huddled in an upper room in a dirt-poor province on the very edge of the Roman Empire. Most of them were working-class people: fishermen, artisans. None had traveled a hundred miles from where they were born. There were no Senators among their number, no governors. No one in this room had the ear of Caesar. This is an age with no radio, no television, no World Wide Web, no Twitter.³

I can just picture the Spirit looking around the room, rolling up her sleeves, and saying, "Well, I've worked with less."

The Spirit did not make these ordinary people into supermen or perfect saints. Not one of them became ten feet tall or arrow-proof. Our records of the early church are distinctly free of people with perfect patience or graciousness that never failed.

³ "Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication." – *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

But the Spirit gave these people what they needed to do God's work in the world. They did not need to be heroes out of myth and legend. They needed to be able to tell the story of Jesus, and of God's love for the whole world. God's love for the whole *cosmos*.

So, the Spirit gave them the ability to speak the languages of the people who were there in Jerusalem. Did you notice? The Scripture says nothing about people speaking languages that no one understood. None of the disciples were speaking English, or Japanese, or speaking gibberish. Each disciple spoke the language that he or she needed to communicate with his or her neighbor.

The Holy Spirit is not big on giving people gifts that are useless, or that do not contribute to what needs to be done. She gave the disciples in Jerusalem the languages that they needed to communicate the good news to the people who were there, so that they could take it back home with them and spread the news. After this day, she gave them the courage and the resources to travel, to bring the news from France to Africa, from Spain to India.

Today, there are missionaries all over the world, bringing the good news of God's love and God's grace to people with word and sacrament, service and love. Their service to God and God's people is laudable. However, far away is not the only place that needs God's love and God's grace. We've "got heathens aplenty right here."⁴

There are children going hungry a mile from here. The state of Ohio is in the midst of one of the worst opiate epidemics in the United States. Humanity is not doing so well as stewards of God's creation. The United States has been at war continually since 2001.

You have heard me say before that the world as a whole is much better than it was when Jesus walked the Earth two thousand years ago, and it is. But there is still a long way to go.

⁴ Shepherd Book, *Firefly*. Episode 2: "The Train Job."

The Holy Spirit blessed you in your baptism, sealed you and marked you as Christ's own. At God's Table, the Holy Spirit nourishes you and strengthens all in you that is good and kind and loving.

The Holy Spirit has given you gifts, gifts that God intends you to use to help bring God's world closer to God's vision of peace and justice for all. I know this because the Spirit has given gifts to me, and to each and every one of us.

Your gifts may include money. But there are gifts more important than money. I'm talking about love and grace and skills like music and cooking and teaching and caring for people. I'm talking about a head for numbers or for languages. None of us has all the gifts of God, but all of us have some.

So, what gifts do you have? Whatever they are, they were given to you so that you could, like our elders and deacons installed this morning, serve God and God's people "with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love."

Let's start with the service and the love.

Let's start with the service and the love. The Holy Spirit will help us with the rest.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.