

The Lectionary with Vicar

The appointed readings for Pentecost Sunday are taken from Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 2:1-21; and John 7:37-39. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

Numbers 11:24-30

Today we read about the Elders chosen to aid Moses in leading the people of Israel. These seventy elders were chosen to serve the people, and as a validation of their positions of leadership, they were temporarily given the gift of prophecy in the Spirit of God. This event foreshadows the greater event of Pentecost, when the gift of the Spirit was given not temporarily to a select few, but to all the people of God, whom He called into His service. Moses even looks forward with longing to the day of Pentecost when he wishes in verse 29 that all the Lord's people would be prophets.

One interesting note on this passage is that the seventy elders did nothing special to deserve the gift of the Spirit or prophecy. We see this clearly in the story of Eldad and Medad, who did not even go up to the tabernacle when they were called, and yet they were still blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. We do not know why they did not go, perhaps they were unwilling or stubborn, or perhaps they had a good reason for their absence, but either way they still received the blessings God gave. We can see that our God is a God who pours out His blessings abundantly, even on those who are unwilling. There is nothing we need to do to earn His blessings, but as a loving Father, He gives us even what we think we do not need.

Acts 2:1-21

The second reading for the day tells the story of the first Pentecost. Since we are celebrating the feast of Pentecost this is the central reading of the day. As mentioned in our numbers reading, there are a few significant differences from earlier outpourings of the Spirit. First, the Spirit is poured out on all the Lord's people who were present. This was not a blessing given to a select few, but to all people that God claimed as His own. Second, this was not a temporary blessing. While some of the effects did not continue, we read throughout Acts of all that the Apostles did in the Spirit, power, and name of God.

I want to take moment to talk especially about the speaking in tongues that happens in this passage. This is a reversal of the separation of humanity that happened at the Tower of Babel. It is one more instance of the results of sin being healed in a foretaste of the kingdom of God. All languages across the known world at the time are represented, from Parthia in the far East to Rome in the West. And it is all done for one purpose: the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all those present.

This gets us to the purpose of Pentecost. The Spirit is given to give God's people the strength and the will to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is by the Spirit that the message is received. Later in this same chapter, we read that three thousand people were baptized that day because of this working of the Holy Spirit. The tongues and other signs do not happen just to show the Spirit's power, they are there to help with spreading the message of the Gospel and building the Church of God.

John 7:37-39

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we read Jesus' proclamation of Living Water that He provides. During the feast of booths, there was a ceremony where water was carried from the pool of Siloam into the temple. If that ceremony was occurring at the time of Jesus' ministry, then this proclamation would have occurred right in the middle of water drawing ceremony, with Jesus pointing to Himself as giving the true living water.

We are told that the living water in this passage refers especially to the Spirit, who had not yet come fully – which would not happen until Pentecost as seen in our previous readings. Here the purpose of the Spirit is slightly different. The Spirit as our living water provides refreshment to those who are in need, strengthens the belief of those who follow Jesus, and pours out into everything that the believer does. This living water both saves us and helps us to live lives pleasing to God.

Finally, there is a reference here to living waters flowing from the heart. This certainly should remind readers of the crucifixion where water and blood flowed out of the pierced side of Jesus. We receive the life-giving blood that poured out from Jesus' side, and with it the living water of the Spirit, when we are accepted into the family of God at our baptism. As a result of this, we, too, pour out the Spirit into the world around us, so that the life-giving waters will come to those around us, where the Spirit will work His will for building up the Kingdom of God.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, as You promised to send Your Holy Spirit, so it came on the day of Pentecost. Grant that I may also live in your Spirit, spreading the good news of Your Gospel by the power the Spirit provides, that Your kingdom may grow more and more until You come in Your glory to rule over all the faithful into eternity. In Your name and by Your power I pray it. Amen.