

**SERMON: "BEING A 'FOR PROPHET' CHURCH"**  
**TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 2:1-21**  
**OLD TESTAMENT NUMBERS 11:24-30**

**May 28, 2023**  
**Pentecost Sunday**

**Dr. Dave Kivett**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is pretty easy to figure out where the word 'holiday' comes from  
It is two words in Old English put together – holy and day  
It used to be used only for holy days. Times have changed  
Except, it would seem, for Pentecost  
Today is a holiday as in holy day ... and just that

Pentecost doesn't have all the other stuff. No gifts. No tree. No eggs  
Not much decorating except for wearing some red (I've got plenty of red)  
Pentecost is a Church holiday – a holy day, not a secular holiday  
One way I've talked about it before is to be a bit of smarty pants and say,  
'There is no one in the mall you need to go see, get your picture taken.'

After reading and praying through the scripture lessons from Numbers and Acts  
about all sorts of people getting the Spirit and quote, unquote 'prophesying'  
I'll work with the mall imagery a bit more. When we've made that visit  
to see Santa or the Easter bunny, where might they have been?  
If they're in a mall, they're usually smack dab, right in the middle

The Spirit, it sure seems, is not so centralized. The way the stories go in Acts  
and especially in Numbers is that the Spirit colors well outside the lines,  
spills all through the mall and out into the parking lot, ends up 'God knows where'

**So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered seventy of the elders of the people and placed them all around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders, and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, so they prophesied in the camp.**

Moses was experiencing some fatigue. Being a leader is tough. He needed help.  
People to share the load. God called seventy people to share leadership with Moses.  
This is the biblical origin of how we do things – we call elders to be a team  
to work together, share the load and lead the people. We just elected  
a nominating committee to help us find those leaders.

## NO PROBLEM

The Nominating committee back then, in this case God, had openings for 70 people  
But the Spirit went further, some of it rested on Medad and Eldad too  
70 became 72. The Holy Spirit spilled ... Is that a problem?

**... a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"**

No problem! "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets?" Moses said.  
It is his way of saying the more the merrier.' It's like ranch dressing. More is better  
We've got ranch, buttermilk ranch, spicy ranch, chipotle ranch, buffalo ranch,  
Parmesan peppercorn ranch, even pickle ranch and of course bacon ranch  
Yes. Would that we had more varieties of ranch dressing ...  
And more variety of prophets too?

Before we go much farther, let's talk about what it means to be a prophet  
In the passage from Numbers the 70 prophets, 72 with spillage  
are filled with the Spirit so they might share leadership with Moses  
So being a prophet, in part, means being a leader

In the passage from Acts, when the Spirit spills out all over Jesus' followers  
they can share the good news in a way that people from all over understand

**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.**

So being a prophet means being a good communicator  
A good communicator about the good news ... about God's deeds

Also in Acts, when Peter quotes the prophet Joel about the Spirit spilling all over  
Men and women, young and old, he says "they shall prophesy"  
Peter talks about how they will see visions and dream dreams  
Again being a prophet is about communicating ...  
having a vision, sharing a dream ... "I Have a Dream"

You see how these go together to make a prophet ... being a leader, sharing the work  
Sharing a vision of what can be, communicating good news?  
You see the need for lots of leaders, lots of prophets. We too can say with Moses  
"Would that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD  
would put his spirit on them!" God has done just that ... with lots of spillage

## TO BLUDGEON?

That is the good news. There are prophets a plenty ... and a variety thereof  
I'll circle back round to that. But before I do, I have to slam on the brakes,  
do the arm bar across you like my mom did when she was teaching me to drive

Got to keep it real. Because when prophets lead, when they communicate  
God's good deeds, when they dream dreams and share good news ...  
That good news runs right up against bad news. It challenges the bad news

I remember when I was in middle school watching PBS. We only had four channels.  
I found the documentary "Eyes on the Prize" about the Civil Rights Struggle  
I was, and still am, very impressed by their work, their perseverance  
in the face of violence, their commitment to justice ... and to non-violence  
That documentary changed the course of my life. It changed me

I remember thinking with the curiosity and bravado of a teenager, if I was an adult then,  
back in the 60's ... what we I have done? I told myself I would have been brave  
One has to be careful what they dream of being and doing  
when they are in middle school ... they might get that chance later

We live in times much like those in many ways. Times that call for courage.  
Times we need God's Spirit to spill all over and give us some prophets  
That is true in the church, what we say and do amongst ourselves  
and it is true in the example we set for and in the larger community

I read a great opinion piece from Religion News Service by an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi  
referencing the story out of Florida where a fifth-grade teacher got in trouble  
for showing a Disney film that included a gay character to her class  
A parent complained to the school. You may have seen the story

The title of the article I found is ... "Religious freedom was meant to protect  
not bludgeon. What happened?" I made copies if any of you are interested.  
The article ends with the straight up and sad truth of how some leaders,  
some prophets have used faith not to inform, but to make others conform

*What once was a fight for presence has now become a fight for absence.  
Religious freedom, and faith-based politics ... has shifted to a fight,  
not to secure their own free expression, but to secure the absence  
of those with whom they disagree.*

There are far too many examples of religious freedom being used to bludgeon  
I am so very tired of the bullying in God's name and I know you're tired of me  
calling attention to it, calling attention to the disturbing and destructive rise  
of Christian nationalism. It frightens me

Some wanted Jesus to be a zealot against Rome. He wasn't.  
Some want Jesus to be a zealot for a certain limited edition of America. He isn't  
Christian nationalism is not good for the nation. It is not good for Christianity

## ELDAD, MEDAD AND YOU DAD

I see Christianity too often used to bludgeon. It makes we want to cry  
(and I have). It makes me want to scream (and I have)  
And it makes me want to give up, quit (and I have not and will not)

Here is why I have not and will not give up. Being a student of history  
(and the many struggles for equal rights from Seneca Falls, Selma and Stonewall)  
I've noticed a cycle to American history ... and what gets us through  
makes us stronger, bends the moral arc of the universe towards justice

About every 50 years we go through a time of real struggle  
Declaration of Independence in 1776, war with Britain in 1812  
Civil War, fighting against one another, in the 1860's, a violent end to reconstruction  
and increase in lynchings around 1916 (the year the film 'Birth of Nation'  
making the Klan look like heroes was shown the White House)

Fifty years later in the 1960's we got Jim Crow laws, church bombings, people killed  
for trying to help black people register to vote, Bloody Sunday on a bridge in Selma  
Now, fifty year years later we have, once again a surge in discrimination  
states making it harder to vote, threats and violence against LGBTQ people,  
immigrants, Jews. Shootings in nightclubs, shopping centers, synagogues

We got through tough times before, I believe, because we had the right leaders  
No, I don't mean our elected leaders. Quite often our elected leaders are  
first and foremost followers (esp. now with the influence of social media)  
They conduct polls, have focus groups. I don't fault them for that, for listening.  
I appreciate their listening. I've called and written many times

Here is what I have noticed, what gives me hope, especially in difficult times  
times I want to cry or scream, or both. In times like this I see leaders  
rise to the occasion ... leaders like Eldad and Medad, ordinary people

I've seen it in this church that seeks to be 'A Place for Everyone.'  
I've seen it in Eldad, Medad ... and You dad. In the examples you set,  
the love you share, the work you do. Two ways in particular

One, I've noticed as I've gotten into my sixties I can get a bit grumpy  
Start thinking things have changed too much, too fast and that younger people  
could really use my wisdom. Which is true. But you know what else is equally true  
I could use their wisdom.

I've said it before and will keep saying it. The real strength of this church is  
not just that we have young people, youth and young children ...  
it is that we have young people in leadership  
Not only is our future in good hands, the present is as well

## SUMMARY

Two, I went to a graduation party yesterday. Lots of Presbyterians at that party  
One of those young people, one of those Presbyterians, had on a cool t-shirt.  
Her shirt was just as prophetic as Medad and Eldad. It had in big letters  
WWJD – What Would Jesus Do. Beneath that it said ‘He Would Love First’  
Now that is leadership, leading with love. We need that kind of leadership  
And God provides it ... sends the right people at the right time.

It's in difficult and divided times like today, I see God's spirit spilled out all the more  
That is when people step up, when people who may have once thought  
to themselves ... If had been around then I think I would have been brave.  
I wouldn't just stand up for myself and speak out for myself,  
I'd do it for my neighbors, for people who need an ally

I wouldn't be a Christian bully (wow is that an oxymoron or what?)  
No, I'd stand up for those who are being bullied.  
I'll readily admit I probably wouldn't do so normally  
but tough times call for tough love from some tough Jesus following folks

Plus, I got this Holy Spirit spilled all over me like Ranch dressing at Pizza Ranch  
Figure I'd do something good with it, Do something about the bad news  
Do something good (somehow, some way) for someone who needs it.