

Pentecost May 24, 2026

Numbers 11:24-30, 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

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Pentecost - coming of the Holy spirit. 25 years since ordination. 34 years Jason. 52 years baptism. Sister calls it my everything day. Share a few stories, permission and ice cream. Many people assume I became a minister because I grew up with parents as ministers. That was not the case. As a teen I considered being a lawyer, a physiotherapist, a secretary, a scientist; I wasn't sure what I would be, but I knew it would be **anything** but a minister. I didn't like moving; I didn't like the odd hours; I knew the job was hard, and I didn't like classmates teasing me about being a preacher's kid. I wasn't about to sign up for a lifetime of any of that.

Not until being lovingly dragged by my close friend to counsel summer church camp after grade 12 graduation did ministry cross my radar. The camp director for whom I had great admiration pressed, "Heather, you have a deep desire to follow God's will for your life and I see a lot of gifts for ministry in you, yet you won't even consider it. Might you be willing to at least pray about it?"

Was I willing to pray about it? Was I willing to let the Holy Spirit lead me? Confirmation came in quiet joy in prayer, hearing ministry invitations in worship aimed right at my heart, and the incredible gift of 4 elders at Westminster who met with me over the course of a year to discern that very question with me - had God given me gifts for ordained ministry in his church?

Thirty two years ago, the answer personally and from the church was "yes" and I became a candidate for ministry, ordained in 2001. It is important for the church to identify, encourage and support those whom God is calling to ordination, diaconal ministry, ruling elders, and other leadership roles. But there are many, many gifts of the Holy Spirit that don't fit in any of those more visible roles.

*To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge... to another faith.... to another gifts of healing... to another the working of powerful deeds... to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues....*

Oh how we like to rank the gifts, service, and activities of ourselves or others. Preaching is so much more important than washing dishes. Or singing a solo is so much more important than running the elevator. The Corinthians liked to play that game too. In our recent Bible Study on this book from the apostle Paul to the young church in Corinth, we read over and over how the congregation there thought speaking in tongues or unknown languages was the most important gift. A practice that folks bragged about and flaunted.

It's no accident Paul lists it last in his smattering of examples. Paul is having none of their foolish grasps at superiority. And we'd be wise to take heed. To one is given through the Spirit the ability to bake and share a flakey pie crust... to another diligence in prayer... to another the ability to climb ladders... to another a ready smile... to another the gift of music, and to another preaching of scripture... to another wisdom and healing.

*Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit,<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services but the same Lord,<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.*

In 2009 I left the ministry to be a stay at home mom and carrying a burden of burnout. We moved to Fort McMurray and some years later ended up in the pews of the Alliance Church.

Among the 250+ who gathered each Sunday, Jason and I were part of the sparse sprinkling of attendees over the age of 35 - no one had grey hair. With so many young families, the congregation implemented a digital check in system for Sunday morning children's ministry. Upon arriving, parents would proceed to a table where a registrar would enter the children's names in the system, print out stickers with the child's name which were then affixed to their back and a corresponding stub was given to the parents. When parents picked up their children from Sunday School, the stub was submitted to the teacher of the day to verify the identity and veracity of the parent and child.

For over a year, that was my God given gift. I entered names on a computer. Not the limelight of preacher's kid, or preacher, but during a season that I didn't have the energy or prompting to serve in other ways, the Holy Spirit provided a way for me to contribute toward the common life of God's church. And it was a gift of the Spirit to me as well.

I got to know the names and faces of so many people making me feel more at home. I offered competent, friendly, efficient help to parents who often looked a little frazzled from whatever Sunday morning had dealt them. I got to welcome not just the parents, but both the outgoing and shy children that needed a personal hello or high five.

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

This is the key to recognizing and exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit in and through us. They are not given as personal property or badges of achievement. The Spirit equips each one to contribute to the common good. Such gifts are not given for self-interest, but spiritual gifts find their value in serving the body of Christ. Part of the adventure of following Christ involves discovering what God has given us to share.

And sometimes that comes as a complete surprise to ourselves or those around us.

Our passage from the book of Numbers tells us that Moses gathered up all those with leadership responsibilities and took them out to the tent of meeting - the place where God dwelt with his people. There Moses prayed for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and the Spirit came. But... *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.*

I wonder why Eldad and Medad weren't present at the tent of meeting. Wonder with me a moment. Why might they not have gone? Busy? Sick? Communication got mixed up? Didn't think they should be numbered among the leaders?

We don't know why, but we do know that the Holy Spirit found them where they were. The spirit rested on them... so they prophesied. Biblical word that means to speak by inspiration. Spirit-energized utterance that reveals, interprets, or applies the will of God. Prophecy calls Israel back to covenant fidelity, denounces idolatry, warns of judgment, and consoles with hope.

We don't know if Eldad and Medad were taken by surprise at the unexpected events. Certainly Joshua was when he found out about it. He wanted the whole thing shut down by Moses. But Moses knew he wasn't in control of God's Spirit. God would move wherever and in whomever God wanted.

In early 2014, we were nearing the city limits of Fort McMurray after a week of Christmas holidays in Medicine Hat. "That was the worst vacation ever," said the small voice from the backseat. I knew my youngest was miffed about *misplacing a toy she'd wanted to play with*, and in an effort to balance the scales I sweetly asked, "What about bowling?"

After a pause... Yes, that was fun, she conceded. What about playing games with grandma and grandpa? Oh yes, she smiled tentatively. What about cousins, sledding, making cookies, crafts, gifts, and the other fun things we did?

Her scowl returned with a harrumph. She was not about to let me distract her from the *awful* hardship she figured had ruined the whole trip.

In a moment of unusual parental patience I mused to myself, "Talk about focusing on a speck to ruin the whole great thing!" And the Holy Spirit pressed upon me, "She's not the only one focusing on the sliver of negative."

I wanted to harrumph, but a flash of understanding swept over me. For the past week, I'd been getting "messages in neon." Ordinary things people said, or I read in a book that leapt out at me as though it were in neon. And all of them pointed toward returning to ministry. I'd been focusing on the 5% of why I didn't think I could. And the Holy Spirit had surprisingly got my attention through the voice of my disgruntled 6 year old.

When Joshua protests that Eldad and Medad don't deserve their spiritual gifts, Moses says he doesn't want fewer people with God's spirit, but more and more and more. Moses says it would be even better if ALL of God's people had his Spirit.

Which is the vision of the prophet Joel that comes to life in the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm. Flames of fire appeared and rested on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.

It's what we celebrate at baptism. Everyone receives the Holy Spirit - God living in and through them. Oh, we can deafen our ears and steel our hearts against the Holy Spirit, but we can also open our ears, minds and hearts to be led.

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.

Not just upon the polished or the powerful. Not just upon the ordained or the eloquent. Not just upon the ones who made it to the tent of meeting on time. But upon all flesh. Upon Eldad and Medad in the camp. Upon tired parents and shy children. Upon dishwashers and pie bakers, elders and elevator operators, singers and listeners, encouragers and prayer warriors. Upon those who preach sermons and those who quietly print name tags for children they may never fully know.

The Holy Spirit refuses to be contained by our categories of importance. And thanks be to God for that. Because there are seasons when we know exactly what gifts we have to offer, and there are seasons when we feel uncertain, or left behind. Seasons when we feel bold enough to speak, and seasons when all we can manage is to show up and offer a small kindness. Yet the Spirit still moves. Still equips. Still calls. Still comforts. Still surprises.

Perhaps today the Spirit is nudging you toward something you have resisted. Perhaps the Spirit is whispering that your gifts matter, even if they seem ordinary to you. Perhaps the Spirit is inviting you not to compare your calling to someone else's, but simply to offer what you have for the common good.

The church does not need more celebrities. The church needs Spirit-filled people. People willing to pray. Willing to serve. Willing to listen. Willing to encourage. Willing to trust that God can use even them.

Because the miracle of Pentecost was never merely strange languages or tongues of fire. The miracle was that ordinary people became vessels of the living God. And they still do.

So may we be people with hearts open to the Holy Spirit. May we bless the gifts we see in one another. May we encourage those whom God is calling. May we have the humility to receive the gifts of others. And may we never assume that the Spirit cannot work through us, or beside us, or beyond us.

For the same Spirit who rested on Eldad and Medad, the same Spirit poured out at Pentecost, the same Spirit given in baptism, is alive and at work even now. Thanks be to God. Amen.