

Rain on All Flesh

A Sermon for Pentecost Sunday

Numbers 11:24–30 | Acts 2:1–21 | John 7:37–39

On the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood up in the temple court and did something unusual. He cried out. He didn't just speak or teach. Jesus *hollered out over the crowd* as if the announcement were too urgent for an ordinary voice. *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."* And then John gives us the explanation: this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed were to receive.

Rivers of living water. Flowing *from within*. Not from a distant source you uncover. Not from a channel you must search out and follow. Rather, from within.

To understand what Jesus was promising and what we celebrate today on this feast of Pentecost, we first have to understand what had been true for every century that preceded it.

In the ancient world, before modern engineering made it possible to carry water almost anywhere, the difference between life and death for a community often came down to one question: are you near the channel?

Irrigation transformed the ancient Near East. Canals and aqueducts carried water from rivers and reservoirs to fields and cities. But the water only went where the channels ran. If your land lay outside the irrigation system, you waited for rain. If you were near the channel, you thrived. If you were not, you hoped.

For centuries before Pentecost, the Spirit of God moved like irrigation: channeled, purposeful, reaching specific people at specific times for specific tasks. The Spirit came upon judges to deliver Israel in battle, upon kings to rule, upon prophets to speak. It was entirely real, entirely powerful, but it was channeled to those whom God appointed for those purposes.

Nowhere is this more vivid than in Numbers 11. Moses is exhausted, overwhelmed by the burden of leading a complaining people. God tells him to gather seventy elders to the tent of meeting. He will take of the Spirit that rests on Moses and distribute it to the seventy. Notice the structure: there is one channel, Moses, and from him the Spirit is extended outward. The channel has reached them.

But then comes the disruption. Eldad and Medad have not come to the tent. They remain in the camp. And yet the Spirit rests on them too, and they prophesy right there, outside the proper location, outside the channel system entirely. Joshua is alarmed. "My lord Moses, stop them!" This isn't how it works. They weren't where they were supposed to be.

Moses' response is one of the most luminous sentences in the Old Testament: "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

It was a wish. A longing. A hope for something that had not yet come.

Fourteen centuries would pass before that wish was answered. And when the answer finally came, it came through a cross, an empty tomb, and an ascension into glory.

Peter does not merely announce the Spirit's arrival on Pentecost morning. He preaches the full arc of what has made this day possible. Jesus of Nazareth, attested by God with mighty works, was delivered up and crucified. But God raised him from the dead, because it was not possible for death to hold him. He was exalted to the right hand of the Father. And then Peter names the hinge on which everything turns: *"Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."* Acts 2:33

The rain falls from the heights of his ascension. Moses could distribute from the Spirit that rested on him, but Moses died and was buried, and the channel ended with him. Christ died too, but death could not hold him. He rose. He ascended. And from his throne, as the reigning Lord of all, he pours out what no earthly channel ever could: the Spirit without measure, on all flesh, forever. The way to God, sealed shut by sin and death, has been opened

through him alone. And precisely because he has opened it, the Spirit now floods through.

He will also return. The Spirit given at Pentecost is the seal and first installment of that final day, the guarantee that the one now reigning will not abandon what he has begun until every promise is fulfilled.

This is why the rain falls. Not a cosmic mechanism, not a religious transaction, but a gift flowing from the completed work of a specific man: the Son of God, crucified for us, risen for us, ascended for us, reigning for us, coming again for us.

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered together, and then came the sound of rushing wind, tongues of fire, and every one of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. All of them. Not the appointed ones. Not the elders at the tent of meeting like in the Old Testament. Not the chief priests and scribes of Jesus' day, but fishermen and tax collectors. Peter reaches immediately for the prophet Joel: *"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."* Pour out: not channel, not distribute through an appointed intermediary, but pour out the way rain falls, indiscriminately, abundantly, from above, on everyone standing in the open.

The sons and the daughters. The young men and the old men. The male servants and the female servants. The categories Joel lists are precisely the categories that, under the old economy, would have excluded someone from the prophetic office. Gender, age, social standing: none of it matters when God pours out rain. You do not have to be positioned correctly near the channel. The rain finds you.

This is what Jesus was promising when he cried out about rivers of living water. Not the old irrigation system, where you had to locate the channel and place yourself beside it, but something entirely new: a spring within the believer. Not a source you seek out, but a source that seeks you and then flows from you.

You did not dig this spring. You could not have. The Spirit given in your baptism, sealed in the Word, sustained at the Table: this is not your project. It is not the product of your spiritual discipline or your religious effort. The

channel does not flow because you maintain it. The rain does not fall because you deserve it. It falls because Christ earned it, opened the way, ascended in triumph, and now reigns as the one who gives it freely.

This is the comfort Pentecost proclaims to anxious hearts. We inhabit a world, and sometimes a church culture, that quietly suggests your spiritual vitality is your responsibility. Pray more, feel more, commit more, as if the Spirit were an irrigation system requiring your constant labor. But the Spirit is not irrigation. The Spirit is rain.

And rain falls on the weary. Rain falls on the doubting. Rain falls on you, with your dry seasons and your persistent sense that your spiritual life is never quite what it ought to be.

Joshua exclaimed that Eldad and Medad should be stopped from prophesizing. Moses wished everyone would speak the Word of the Lord. Joel said that day would arrive. Jesus stood up and cried out, "Come and drink." Peter, standing before the bewildered crowd, explained that day was the one Joel had spoken about. And the promise he made still stands, because the Lord who made it still reigns: "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off."

For all who are far off. Even those who weren't at the tent. Even Eldad and Medad in the camp. Even you.

The Spirit does not wait for you to find water. Christ has done everything necessary. The rain is already falling.

Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

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