

Everyone a Prophet Joel 2:28, 29

²⁸ After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on the servants, both male and female, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

We don't know much about the prophet Joel. We don't know when he prophesied. We don't know who was king at the time he prophesied. We do know from the book of Joel that it was a difficult time for God's people. Swarms of locusts had plagued the Promised Land, destroying all vegetation in their path. Then a severe drought followed that left God's people begging for rain and for forgiveness. That's really why God sent these catastrophes. He wanted his people to repent. And repent they did. When they turned back to the Lord for deliverance, God promised them complete rescue. He'd put an end to the locusts and the drought. He'd replace destruction with prosperity. His blessings would far surpass any losses they faced from locusts or drought. But far greater than any rain that would fall that would restore the land, far greater than God's people could ever have dreamed, God's blessings would extend to all people. God would bless all people with a service that God had once saved for a select few. God had his prophet Joel tell us when this would take place. When God poured out his Spirit on his people, then everyone was a prophet.

The prophet tells us to whom God would pour out his Spirit. *After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.* Sinful flesh gives birth to sinful flesh. Sin is passed from one generation to the next. And Scripture describes the awful condition sin leaves us in. The Bible uses words like blind, dead, and enemies of God to explain our sinful condition. Sadly we are born into this world without an ounce of spiritual life in any of us. Our flesh can only take us farther and farther away from our God.

Our lives would remain hopeless, except for the fact that our God took on human flesh. Through his miraculous birth to a virgin, he entered life without sin. He then lived life to perfection for us all. Every thought he produced, every word that he spoke, every thing he did was perfect. Even when he got angry, he displayed righteous anger and did it without sin. Remember when his disciples were sending parents away with their small children. He got angry and scolded his disciples, but did not sin. Then there were those moneychangers who were turning God's house into a den of thieves. You bet he got angry when he overturned their tables and drove them out of the temple area. Again, it was righteous anger, not sinful. His whole life was righteous. That is one reason he took on human flesh. So he could do what we never could—live life to perfection, just like he commanded us.

That's not the only reason he took on flesh and blood. He also came to die for us. No other person could give up his life and satisfy God completely. Every lustful, greedy thought that crosses your mind, every curse, every lying word that passes your lips. He paid for every last one when he died on the cross. That should have been our death. But he endured it for us. The grave should scare us all. We deserve that as punishment for our sin. But we turn to another grave. We look to another tomb, the one that some women came to visit on a Sunday

following Passover. You know what they didn't find? Their Lord's lifeless body. Instead, an angel told them he had risen just like he said he would. Our Savior also said some important words just before he died. He said, "It is finished!" He wasn't just finished with this miserable life. He was finished with sin, our sin, all sin. His death paid the price for all of it. And his return to life on Easter is proof that God is satisfied. Now God forgives all our sins.

His work was done. For forty days he showed himself alive. Before he ascended back to heaven, he gave his followers an important assignment. They were to spend the rest of their days sharing the good news about Jesus with the world. What an important but difficult assignment. How would they, how would anyone be able to do it. Our Lord made a special promise. Not only would he be with them to the end. He promised a special gift to each of them.

Ten days following their Lord's ascension, fifty days following the Passover, the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem. That's when Joel's prophecy came true. We read it earlier in the book of Acts. *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently (2:1-4).* Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jews from all around the Mediterranean world were hearing about their Savior Jesus. They were hearing about Jesus in their own native language. Those were languages the disciples had never learned before. But filled with the Holy Spirit they began to prophesy in those languages. And God used their witness to create faith in the hearts of many who listened. Joel's prophecy came true on Pentecost. People gathered in Jerusalem from all around the world. God poured out his Spirit on the disciples and all of them began to prophesy.

God had used an Old Testament prophet to predict this event: *Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. Even on the servants, both male and female, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.* Now understand how this prophecy would have sounded to an Old Testament child of God. Prophecy was not something that everyone did. It was something God had reserved for a select few. Being a prophet was very special. God's people did not have a Bible in their homes. The Bible wasn't written yet. God chose prophets to speak his word. On one occasion God did speak directly to his people. That happened at Sinai and it really scared the Israelites. So God chose instead to send his word through prophets. Sometimes God sent his message in a dream to the prophet while he was asleep at night. Sometime the message came during the day by a vision that only the prophet could see. Prophets had a very important job. They would bring God's Word to people. And God's people relied on the prophets to speak his word faithfully. Where they spent eternity depended on what prophets told them.

But then a prophet named Joel comes around with a surprising message from God. He spoke of a time when God would change his policy on prophecy. Men and women, young and old,

even those on the lowest level of society God would use to relay his saving word to people. Of course, we see that happening on Pentecost. Normally we think of just the apostles receiving the Holy Spirit. But there is nothing in the book of Acts restricting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to just those few men. The chapter before tells us that Jesus had 120 followers in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. And when that Sunday was over, there were 3,000. That's because God filled his people with the Holy Spirit and they proclaimed the message they received from God. On Pentecost, everyone was a prophet.

Could God do the same today? Imagine St. Michael's or our Winona circuit, or our Mississippi River Valley conference, or our Western Wisconsin district or even our beloved Wisconsin Synod expanding by 3,000 on any given Sunday. Sadly we're tempted to think that God can't repeat what happened on Pentecost. Well, how big is our God? Do we really have a God who does the impossible? Look at what he did with sinful flesh. He uses sinful flesh to preserve his saving word. 3,400 years after Moses started writing the Bible's first five books, we still have his saving word today. Consider how he used sinful flesh to carry out his plan to save mankind. He used betrayal, denial, abandonment, rejection, torture and injustice. He used timid men from Galilee, men with little education, to bring his saving message to a dying world.

He can do and does do the same with sinful flesh like us. Maybe you think that only a person with seminary training can share the message about Jesus. Maybe you think it's too big a task for a church like St. Michael's. But we still worship a God who does the impossible. He found a way to become one of us without becoming sinful like us. He found a way to punish our sin and pardon us sinners without violating his perfect justice. And then he took the impossible task of telling a world of sinners about the world's only Savior. He gave that job to sinners like us.

And then Pentecost came, and God poured his Spirit on all his people. From that starting point in Jerusalem, men and women, young and old, slave and free have continued sharing Jesus with the world. He started with 120 believers. Consider what he could do with the 75 of us that attend on average. Imagine 75 of us united in one purpose and walking together to further God's kingdom. Imaging all of God's people throughout the world filled with God's Spirit through the use of word and sacrament. Imagine them so filled with conviction that they're ready at all times to give the reason for the hope that is in them. And when the world defiantly tells us to keep our mouths shut, God's Spirit will lead us to say as Christ's first Spirit-filled followers: *"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20). Imagine such a church.

Thank God for Pentecost. He started pouring out his Spirit on all his people. Now everyone is a prophet. Everyone shares a mission. We bring the good news about our Savior to a dying world. Seem impossible? What seems impossible becomes a reality when you're filled with the Spirit. Stay filled with God's Spirit through word and sacrament. And watch what God can do through you and me. Watch what he can do when everyone is a prophet.