

“Expect Chaos”
May 11, 2008
Geneseo United Methodist Church
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Numbers 11:24-30 ²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. ²⁶ However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" ²⁹ But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" ³⁰ Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

We are blessed to have the word of God. This book holds the truth that we believe in. In it we find 66 books, some are prophecy, some are poetry, some are history, some are letters, they are all words of love to us.

Of course the Bible as we have it is fairly new. In the early Christian years there was only the Old Testament, and only in scrolls, nothing as neat as the single volume we now call the Bible.

Today the bible we have is convenient. The freedom we experience is easy. In America we can carry our bible anywhere. We can read from it whenever we want. Many of us have bibles on our shelves, on our night stands, in our cars, and all 66 books are conveniently bound together.

The Bible is the number one bestseller of all time. It is the most owned translated and prized book of all history. But something has gone drastically wrong with a compiled, bound, canonized, and a sealed volume of God's word.

Our scripture text for today happens back when there was little or nothing of the written word of God. Moses is the person who wrote the first five books of the Bible, and here we find him in the middle of his career. So it is obvious that none of the New Testament had been written, and none of the

books after Deuteronomy had been written. It is even possible that the first five books had not been completely voiced by God and written by Moses at this time.

So here are these Israelite people, wandering in the desert, without any written word of God. They didn't have Bibles sitting on every shelf, coffee table, and night stand. They couldn't find a copy at the local manna store. God's word was not the commodity that it is today. The written form was absent all together. But the presence of the Spirit whom inspired those words was very alive and real.

It says that the Spirit that was upon Moses was placed upon the elders and that they all prophesied. In that moment they experienced the word of God within their own flesh. For the seventy that had gathered, that event happened behind closed doors, they were separated from the people. They must have thought that was an appropriate way to experience God.

I think we do the same thing. We have come to believe that it is ok for us to pray in church, but not out in public. It is ok for us to sing a hymn or praise song behind the closed doors of the church, but not in a car with our friends or family. It is ok for us to think about what God tells us in church, but not share those thoughts on face book, or my space. Why is that?

That was what the Israelite people must have thought too. Look at this young man who came running to tell on his friends. He told Moses and the elders that two of them were loose among the common people. They were prophesying in the streets. (Oh no, what a tragedy) Obviously he thought they should be silenced. Aaron also quickly agreed, asking that they be told to stop. But what was Moses' response? He said, "I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

All of the Lord's people, all of them! That is what Moses said. And all of this happened before there was a written Bible. This was before Jesus came to earth.

Jump forward some 1400 years to the time of Jesus, to his death and resurrection. At this time, they did not have what we call the New Testament. It was still happening; they only had the Old Testament.

We just celebrated the fact that after Jesus rose from the dead he walked on the earth for 40 days continuing to teach his disciples. But today we celebrate what is called Pentecost. (Yes I also know that it is Mothers day, and mothers, we appreciate you and I believe God powerfully places his spirit on mothers with the demands that face them today. I am not trying to skip over

how important Mothers day is, but I think even more important is Pentecost and how the Holy Spirit touches each of our lives.)

Who can tell me what you know about Pentecost? What happened, why do we call it Pentecost, and why is it important for us today?

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That is right, it was 50 days after the Resurrection of Christ, the disciples were in the upper room praying and the Holy Spirit came down and rested on their heads like tongues of fire. (I think it might have been like what happened to Moses and the elders in the book of Numbers. It is the day that Peter preached for the first time, and the church was born when 3,000 people believed and were baptized. That was Pentecost, and that is what we celebrate today.

Now what these two events have in common is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit gets involved in the Church, all forms of tradition, comfort, and organization fall apart. It is no longer about human led prayer, bible reading and song singing. When the Spirit descends with such power and authority, radical things start to happen; things that cannot be contained by human efforts.

In your bulletin I am sure you have found flames. There are seven different gifts of the Spirit listed on those flames, so you probably don't have the same one as the person sitting next to you. You can find them all listed in Isaiah 11. These are ways that the Spirit manifests his presence, activity and power in our lives.

The seven gifts are: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Strength, Knowledge, Fear of the Lord, and Reverence. As Christians who believe in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, each of us have these gifts in our lives, the question is how much do we let the Spirit guide us?

I ask that you take the flame you received and place it somewhere that you will see it every day. May it remind you to pray for an increase of the Holy Spirit in your life, and in the life of the Church.

But God's people don't always let the Spirit work. Look at this man, and Aaron who would have silenced the two elders from prophesying. Look at some of the witnesses who saw the disciples on Pentecost and thought they were drunk. All through scripture we find the radical move of the Holy Spirit trying to be quenched by those who are comfortable right where they are.

So let me ask you today, what has the Church become, not just Geneseo, but the Church at large? Are we a Spirit filled body of believers who let the Spirit of God lead and control our lives, or have we settled for complacency?

You know, we have something today that neither Moses had, nor the disciples had in their time. We have the full word of God to guide us in our relationship with God. But now it seems so contained, so controlled. Too often we place it on a shelf and leave it to collect dust. Too often we leave the words sealed rather than loosing them in our lives. Too often the Holy Spirit is stifled by our desire for a clean cut, bound up, Sunday morning, boxed religion.

We have the word of God, but we keep it closed so that the Spirit cannot get out.

I like the way Jason Rathod, age 24, stated it when he addressed the General Conference on April 24th. He said, "We've grown dangerously close to becoming what Martin Luther King Jr. called an 'irrelevant social club' that remains 'silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.'"

I don't know about you, but that is not what I am called to be. I believe in a risen Christ who transforms lives, who heals broken hearts, who restores relationships, and who carries the burdens of those who are oppressed. If I believe that, I cannot remain silent, I cannot deny the hurting people of the world the opportunity to hear that Jesus loves them.

As I prayer walked this week I was reminded of what we talked about last week. The fact that we are called to be disciples, to make disciples, and to go to the ends of the earth with that good news.

I spent 15 hours this week praying, walking, and talking with people on our prayer map, and during that time I was convinced that there is a great amount of need out there. Yes, many people have a church, but somehow many of them feel forgotten, or unable to share their personal pain with their church family. So many of them were touched at the simple gesture of offering to pray for them. I must keep walking to finish the task that God has given me, and in the process I know God will bless my efforts and touch hearts.

I hope that each of you are praying too. Pray for your neighbor, your friends, your family, and our church community. Pray for a move of the Spirit, for an outpouring of God's grace, and for courage to step out of our comfort zone to fulfill our calling as disciples.

One of the books I am reading challenged me to think about what the Church would look like in the year 2100 A.D. That is 92 years from today. Actually it pointed out that most mainline Churches will not be here. The reason is precisely the fact that we have stopped being faithful to the Biblical mandate of going out and making disciples. We have turned inward so that we only care for our current members. Not only that, but we have stopped talking about our individual faith experiences. Consequently we forget that God exists all together because we don't hear what he is doing in the lives of those around us.

Now I am ready to break this cycle. I am called to start living an Apostolic life. I am going to start praying that God will release his Holy Spirit on me, each of you as members of Geneseo, and upon this community. I pray that it looks something like it did in Numbers chapter 11 or at Pentecost.

Now I will give fair warning, not everyone will be excited about a move of the Holy Spirit. Some people will be uncomfortable, fearful, and they may even ask for it to stop like Aaron did. But as Moses said, "I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Are you willing to be an Apostle of Christ? Are you willing to pray for the Holy Spirit to light a fire in your heart? Are you willing to watch the face of our congregation and community change as we meet God along the road of prayer and discipleship?

If your answer to these things is yes, then start praying. If your answer is no, then I challenge you to ask yourself why? Maybe you should be praying that you will be open to whatever the Holy Spirit begins to do in your life. Maybe it starts as small as opening your Bible and reading one verse per day. Maybe it means spending 5 minutes in prayer.

Whatever you do, don't go home and do nothing, or the same old thing you do every week. Find a way to meet with God this week. Amen.