

Rev. Lisa Schrott
May 24, 2026 Pentecost Sunday
Numbers 11: 24-29 (CEB) & Acts 2: 1-4, 14-18 (CEB)
Communal Vision and Dreams

So here we are. We heard the scripture of Jesus ascending to heaven last week, ending with the disciples gathering in Jerusalem. They were gathered to celebrate Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, a Jewish holiday occurring 50 days after the Passover. In Greek, Pentecost means 50, hence the use of this term by Luke, the author of Acts. So the disciples are gathered and waiting for the promise that they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Hear now these words from Acts Chapter 2, beginning with verses 1-4 and then continuing with verses 14-18 using the Common English Bible Translation.

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. ...

Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! These people aren't drunk, as you suspect; after all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy. **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

Welcome to Pentecost - what we consider the birth of the church. The book of Acts opens with these words: In the first book (that is the book of Luke), Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. While staying with them, Jesus ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

And when the Holy Spirit sweeps in, the Holy Spirit sweeps in. It is dramatic and chaotic, noisy with a violent rushing sound – a howling fierce wind that was a reminder of creation: When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters (Genesis 1:1-2). It is dramatic and chaotic visually as well, with individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. It was not a fire that destroys, but more rather like the fire that Moses encountered at the burning bush -

the Lord's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames, but it didn't burn up (Exodus 3:1-2).

I wonder if the disciples were surprised that the Holy Spirit arrived on this day or did they suspect something might happen on this particular day. I mentioned that the Hebrew name for Pentecost is Shavuot. This Hebrew holiday has a dual purpose. It is a festival celebrating the spring harvest, and it is celebration of when the Hebrew people received the law – the Torah - from God through Moses. The Jewish College ministry Hillel has a wonderful explanation of the significance of Shavuot:

“Shavuot is the day when the Jewish people received the Torah – our central source of sustenance and map for our peoplehood. It marks the exact moment when the Israelites transformed from a band of wandering refugees escaping Egypt into a *people* with self-determination, a collective purpose, a promised land (Israel), a communal identity, and a covenant with one God. Shavuot marks the day we transitioned from a scrappy start-up concept to an enterprise.”¹

I love that last line – the day we transitioned from a scrappy start-up to an enterprise. That definition sounds a lot like what happened that Pentecost morning in Jerusalem. The followers of Jesus transitioned from a scrappy start-up of eleven disciples and some family and friends of Jesus into a community enterprise. At the end of Acts chapter 2, Peter preaches and tells the gathered crowds:

“Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God invites.” With many other words he testified to them and encouraged them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day (Acts 2:38-41).

It seems somehow fitting that the formation of the community of the followers of Jesus happened on the day when those gathered were celebrating formation of the Hebrew community so many years before. In the Hebrew tradition, Shavuot was “the moment when God's will was expressly communicated to human beings. It also marked the transition of the ancient Israelites into a religious community bound by covenant into a mutual relationship with God.”² You can see the parallels to the Christian Pentecost celebration.

One of the traditions of Shavuot is to read the book of Ruth from the Hebrew scriptures. Ruth was a climate refugee, a Moabite women who joins in her mother-in-law Naomi in returning to Bethlehem, Naomi's home town. Shavuot recognizes that Ruth's acceptance of the Jewish faith and traditions is similar to that of the Jewish acceptance of the Torah. Ruth becomes part of the community and gives birth to a son who will be the grandfather of King David. The Festival of

¹ Stephanie Goldfarb. What Even is Shavuot? *Hillel*. May 20, 2026 <https://www.hillel.org/what-even-is-shavuot/>

² My Jewish Learning. Shavuot 101. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shavuot-101/>

Shavuot takes on special significance for those who don't come from a Hebrew lineage and rather have chosen the Jewish faith.³ It is a recognition that there are no insiders or outsiders. It is a recognition of the spiritual liberation through God's laws and teachings that followed the Israelites' physical liberation from slavery in Egypt. It recognizes that the Torah was given to shape the dreams and visions of people from varied backgrounds into one community following the Lord God.

This theme of communal dreams and visions is seen in the Old Testament passage we heard Kathi read. The Book of Numbers, an oft-neglected Old Testament book, relates the trek of the Israelites physically and spiritually to Canaan. All our human emotion is on full display. While there are moments of joy, mostly the emotions run to the angry, jealous, life is unfair end of the spectrum. The Hebrew people complain and complain and complain. And like many of us on a long road trip, Moses' patience runs out. He pulls the car over to the side of the road and asks what he did to deserve such an ungrateful, whiny lot.

Moses says to the Lord "I can't do this anymore. You might as well put me to death now, because if I have to listen to them tell me how good the melons were in Egypt one more time, I'm going to lose it." And the Lord, the merciful Lord, tells Moses to gather 70 elders and bring them to the tent of meeting and the Lord will not only talk to Moses in their presence, but will **take some of the spirit given** to Moses and put it on the elders so that they can share the burden.

So Moses gathers the elders in the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting is the designated location where God meets with Moses. During their journey to Canaan, the Tent of Meeting was set-up outside of the camp proper where the people were living. We hear this morning that the Lord God came down and spoke to Moses and the elders gathered at the Tent of Meeting, and the Spirit rested on the elders and they prophesied and saw visions. They became Spirit-empowered leaders and the burden Moses has been carrying is shared. They all sing Kum Bay Yah and skip and dance their way to Canaan.

Not so fast. Because we have a tattletale in our midst who just can't wait to report to Moses and the other elders that Eldad and Medad remained inside the camp (where the Spirit was able to find them just fine) instead of going out to the Tent of Meeting. And like an older sibling in the back seat of the car on a long trip, Joshua can't wait to shout "Stop them!". Joshua. Joshua, the golden boy pipes in. Joshua already had some credentials at this point in the journey. He was a young man, but was included in the group of elders and he was the assistant of Moses. Not AN assistant, but THE assistant. He had credibility and access. And we know the rest of his story, that of the hero who led the conquest of Canaan. He even gets a book of the Bible named after him.

³ Kyle Desrosiers-Levine. For Jewish converts, the spring holiday Shavuot takes on special significance. Religion News Service. May 21, 2026 <https://religionnews.com/2026/05/21/for-jewish-converts-the-spring-holiday-shavuot-takes-on-special-significance/>

Was Joshua just doing his job here, protecting Moses' authority from outsiders and making sure that the prophesy was decent and in order? Or maybe Joshua was feeling a bit insecure and threatened. Who are these upstart Eldad and Medad that think that they can stay in the camp and prophesy there instead of joining with the rest of the elders in the tent of meeting? And if they can do it, what's to stop other people from prophesying in the camp? Next thing you know, we will have chaos. Who will control all of this Spirit?

Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? If only all the Lord's people were prophets with the Lord placing his spirit on them!" And Luke, the author of Acts tells us: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy."

Both the texts from Numbers and Acts are reminders that that the Spirit has rained down not just on the ones who society say should have the power. The Spirit has rained down on a diversity of peoples. That diversity is a blessing and through the work of the Holy Spirit a common vision and dreams for the future can be birthed. The community that is celebrated at Shavuot was molded and shaped through the giving of the law. The community that is celebrated at Pentecost was fashioned and forged through the indwelling of the Spirit.

As one commentator has noted about those gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost, "This community is strikingly diverse, inclusive, and egalitarian. The Jews Peter addresses are immigrants from all over the known world ("known" to Luke, that is!) who now live in Jerusalem, and the movement will soon open up to include Gentiles as well (Acts 10). In this way, Luke casts the church as a spirited community of bridge-builders, visionaries, and dreamers, male and female, slave and free (Acts 2:17) — and soon enough, this egalitarian, communitarian ethos extends to the church's social organization: "they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:43-47)."⁴

Pentecost is both an ending and a beginning. It ends the understanding of Jesus' ministry as a solo act, with the disciples as followers. And it begins the understanding of Jesus' ministry as one empowered by apostles — those sent out in Jesus' name. Empowered by the breath and winds of the Spirit. Like the breath that fills our lungs, this breath allows us to grow and develop and yes change to address the pressing issues we face in our world today. This is what it means to become the church. As the commentator from the Salt Project reminds us, "... at its heart, the church is a mission, God's mission, loving and protecting our neighbors as we would love and protect ourselves — and the call, the challenge, the adventure continues. In an age of profound distrust, fear, and fragmentation, the church's mission — the essence of Pentecost — has never been more pressing."⁵

⁴ Salt Project. Commentary on Pentecost (Year A): Acts 2:1-21 and Numbers 11:24-30; <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/5/25/understand-and-connect-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-pentecost>

⁵ *ibid*