



## 'Spirit Speak'

Day of Pentecost  
8:15 & 11:00 am, May 15, 2016  
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[Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I can picture the book in my mind as it sat on our coffee table: Blue cover, with a photograph of a dark-haired woman gazing intently at a crystal ball held in her hands. When I was a child, our household was but one of many households around the country purchasing the best-selling book, *A Gift of Prophecy: The Phenomenal Jeane Dixon*. I was too young to read the book itself in its entirety, but I understood its premise, and I knew what Jeane Dixon believed herself to be.

Dixon was a self-proclaimed psychic who predicted the future. She also proclaimed that her prophetic ability was given to her by God. The book sold more than three million copies—probably not because it was so well-written or compelling, but because Dixon was already a celebrity for reportedly predicting the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In the mid-60's our country was mesmerized by that assassination, by the Warren Commission that investigated it, and by the ongoing Kennedy mystique, so of course Dixon's book would sell like hotcakes.

And it is the memory of that blue-covered book with the photo of a woman and her crystal ball which crystallized my initial definition of "prophecy": The ability to predict the future.

In many ways, even those major and minor prophets whose words are found in the Old Testament of the Bible (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, Joel, et al.) are understood as having described the future for God's people. They didn't gaze into a crystal ball, but our scripture tells how us they were called by God, and then filled with God's Spirit to be God's mouthpiece and proclaim to Israel what its future and God's plan would be. Often the prophecy was harsh judgment—a prediction of dire events in the life of Israel at the hands of stronger nations, the consequence of Israel's faithlessness and sin. Sometimes the prophecy was hopeful promise of a future redemption with God's gentle leading of his people home from exile—there would be forgiveness, and a peace restored.

From those prophets of old, and from self-proclaimed prophet Jeane Dixon, many of us have the notion that prophetic ability is future-directed. What WILL happen, not so much what IS happening. And most of us would not consider ourselves among the ranks of prophets, given that definition.

If that is what it means to be a prophet—a person with the ability to predict the future—then what are we to make of Peter's words in our reading today? *Because Peter changes the definition.* He defines prophecy as present-tense, that what IS happening in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost is a prophetic word about the activity of God in the world right then and there. We just had a dramatic reading of what took place that day: The crowds gathered in Jerusalem for the annual barley harvest festival were Jews who hailed from every known nation, and they are simply astonished at the sound that surrounds them. They hear the story of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, being spoken to them in their own language by uneducated country bumpkins from Galilee—those first disciples following Jesus. When the astonished crowds wonder about this event and ask what it might mean, Peter raises his voice to explain that it is a fulfillment of the words of the Prophet Joel. That Old Testament prophet predicted a future day when all God's children, young and old, men and women, slaves and free, would be given the Spirit to prophesy. Peter tells the crowds **this is that** day. Peter appropriates Joel's words and assigns them new meaning in the light of what God has done through Jesus Christ and the sending of his Spirit. Peter's to the crowd's question "What does this mean?" is that "Spirit Speak" is happening.

Peter is not suggesting prophecy is about predicting the future. Instead, as Professor Matt Skinner writes, for Peter, "prophecy is truth-telling. It is naming the places and ways where God intervenes or initiates in the world." (Matt Skinner, [Workingpreacher.com](http://Workingpreacher.com), 5/23/10) Such prophecy identifies how God's saving ways are being made known in our world right now, as we speak.

And not only does Peter tell the astonished crowds that the first followers of Jesus are prophets, he says God makes it possible for **all** Jesus' followers to "Spirit Speak." Prophecy is not the sole possession of Peter and the first disciples, or limited to some elite hierarchy of priests or a particular nation or group. Rather, the community of Jesus' followers of every race and every homeland are given this spiritual gift. Age, gender or status make no difference. The gift of prophecy defies social, racial, ethnic and economic boundaries. Jesus' followers everywhere are being equipped to communicate the truth about God. God is creating and shaping this community we now call the Church by his ever-creative Spirit.

Which means the ability to prophesy, to communicate the truth about God, is also not something done in isolation. What began as a small group of secluded disciples, huddled in fear as they wrestled with the wonder of Jesus risen from the dead is now becoming a world-wide event—a story being shared...and believed...and shared...and believed...and shared again. Such is the continuous nature of "Spirit Speak."

And the ultimate goal of "Spirit Speak"? Perhaps Peter's final quoted words from Joel give us a clue: "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved..." In other words, God is always working to redeem the creation he loves—you and me and the world in which we live. And "Spirit Speak" is the process by which it will happen.

So the event of Pentecost is not a one-time occurrence that happened a long, long time ago in a land far, far away. Nor were the disciples-turned-prophets describing an end-time far into our future for us to imagine. Instead, Pentecost began that day and is still happening now. Just as God used Peter and his Galilean companions, God is using us.

You and I “Spirit Speak” all the time. And it’s going on all around us in God’s Church. Why, consider this:

When 14 of our young people from YG travel to Detroit, Michigan this coming July, and do the hard work of repair and rehab of blighted neighborhoods, they will be Spirit speaking. When our children learn about God’s love at Vacation Bible School this summer, and then share what they’ve learned with their family and friends (maybe even singing and dancing a song or two), they will be Spirit speaking. And what about this: When our tutors go to Harrisburg schools and help youngsters grow in math and reading skills, what are they doing but communicating the truth of our loving God in numbers and letters, in friendship and encouragement? When our congregation’s leadership asks us to wrestle with decisions about our facility and resources, what are our council, committees and teams doing but calling us to embrace that gift of the Spirit and seek to bring fresh vitality to the whole ministry of our congregational life? And when you and I pray for one another, offer the handshake of reconciliation, console a grieving brother or sister here, generously aid others in their need, and speak the truth in love, what are you and I doing but prophesying? Spirit speaking with our very lives?

But suppose we missed these things, had our eyes closed to these moments of prophecy? Then perhaps we need to take a look around this room and this building, and among our people. So I invite you to do so, then tell me where you see the Spirit active in our midst, and where we are being prophets. Keep your eyes open, then send me an email or note about what you see. And don’t just tell me, but tell one another. In this way, we will encourage one another in our continual “Spirit Speak.” Remember, Pentecost is far from over. **AMEN.**

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