As some of you know, over the last few years I have been reading books by personal productivity guru David Allen. He has an approach to “the game of work and the business of life” he calls “Getting Things Done.” I’ve found his stuff quite helpful. It has helped me keep more on top of all the things in my life that need tending to. I highly recommend it.

One of his books bears the title, *Ready for Anything*. It’s a good book, but, of course, that title is a bit of a challenge. Ready for *anything*? How can I be ready for anything? We can be ready for *some* things. But for *anything*?

Part of the stress of modern life, of course, is all the “anythings” that come at us, expecting us to be ready. And try as we might, we can’t be ready for all of it. So many people are so burdened by all their anythings (both the known and the unknown) that come at them, sometimes, it feels, all at once.

And yet, another aspect of modern life is that, whether we realize it or not, we are, in fact, ready for more anythings than people were, say, a hundred years ago. Not that we’re better. Not that we’re more skilled. Rather, many of us have just learned this *different* skill: to be able to handle a lot of different inputs, a bunch of different situations, in a flow of stuff that is constantly changing. We’ve learned to deal with it. We may yearn for a slower time from a dreamy golden past. But many of us have learned to handle the stuff of life in such a way that we are, if not ready for anything, then ready for a whole lot of somethings.

You friends of mine whom we’ve congratulated today as graduates (Tara, Desi, Amber, Karen), as well as others besides, younger than them or maybe a bit older, surely you have learned (or are learning) these, oh, martial arts of living. You’re light on your feet. You’re quick thinking. You’re flexible. Maybe you’re not ready for *anything*. But the “somethings” for which you are ready seem to number far higher than they did for those of us who are older when we were your age. Older people might grumble about what you don’t know (forgetting, as we older people sometimes do, what it’s like to be young), but they are also a bit envious of and perhaps embarrassed by how much more you do know, your facility with all the tools and gadgets and concepts that, to be blunt, flummox them. Sometimes, it seems to the rest of us that you are ready, if not for anything, then a whole lot more than we are.

But sometimes it all gets a little overwhelming. You know this. Even those who claim to be masters of multitasking sometimes grow weary of the pace, the frequently shifting frames of focus, and they just want to stop. Even those who appear to be ready for anything sometimes feel that they are really ready for nothing.

You graduates, and those who are looking ahead a few years to graduation, will feel both these ways: at times, you’ll feel ready for anything; other times, you’ll feel ready for
nothing.

Hear me on this: This is normal. This is human. You have probably felt both these ways before, and you will again.

But there is a spiritual aspect to all this that I believe is worth exploring. And it connects well, and importantly, with our scriptures for today.

You see, today we remember Pentecost. This was the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus. No, the Holy Spirit was from before the very beginning, because the Holy Spirit is God: just as much God as is the creator, just as much God as is Christ.

But on that particular day something special happened: the Spirit came upon those who loved Jesus.

I like the language that is used.

The Bible passage says that “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among the disciples, and a tongue rested on each of them.” Tongues of fire.

It says that “they were filled with the Holy Spirit”; and we might not get it that in the language of the New Testament, as in the Old, the word for “Spirit” is also the word for “wind” or “breath.” So, they were filled with this holy breath.

It says that this was the sign of God’s promise to “pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” Pouring, as if the Holy Spirit could take the form of a fluid that could flow, be poured, drenching those who received the Spirit.

I like that, these different images: fire, filling, breathing, pouring.

This is so dynamic, so full of movement and energy. Now here’s the thing, for those who think that the religion of God’s people is always static and stifling, in all times lacking energy, in every era sapping passion out of everything it touches. For this was energy that had been long expected, even many years before. For years the prophets of Israel had been letting their people know of God’s promise to pour out this mighty, flaming, empowering, breath of God, pour it out on young and old, pour it out on women and men, pour it out slaves and free, pour it out unreservedly, generously, graciously, pour it out to mark the start of a brand new age, the season of the Lord.

And even going back, way, way back, there was a memory of something like this happening when Moses was around. It was when the Spirit of the Lord was poured upon the 70 elders of the people. It happened outside the camp. These men had been selected, and they had been gathered together around the tent. And then the Spirit came upon them, and they started to prophesy, which means that they began to speak what God gave them to speak. It was amazing!

But there were these two men who were supposed to be in the group, these slowpokes whose names were Eldad and Medad. They weren’t with the others, but they were back in the camp. (What were they doing? Playing cards? Watching TV?) They were back in the camp, rather than with the other elders. And yet, it happened to them, too: they prophesied, just as the others prophesied. That was surprising. That was unexpected.

So one of the young men runs to Moses and Joshua, Moses’ assistant. “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!” Oh no! He tells them, and Joshua breathlessly repeats it to Moses — the scandal: “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!”
For this was out of bounds. This was not what was expected. Only the elders were supposed to be given the gift of prophecy that day. And they were to receive, and demonstrate, that gift only in a specific place. But Eldad and Medad were tardy, so they were not in the right place. And yet they were unexpectedly doing what others were given to do.

Moses listens, patiently waiting until Joshua has finished his rant. And then Moses has an answer to all this that is just so great:

“Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”

Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets! Wouldn’t it be wonderful, Moses says, if every last one of the people had the Spirit of the Lord on them? That would truly be something to celebrate, says Moses, not something to fear, not something to reject.

Isn’t that great? Moses did not take this as a threat. He didn’t receive this news as some sort of challenge to his authority. He did not worry that this unexpected happening somehow meant that he had failed. No, he saw it as simply a sign of God’s love and power. He was ready for this, because he knew the blessing of God, and trusted in God’s power.

So it was that Pentecost was the realization of something long expected, the arrival of a promise made long before. The followers of Jesus were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. It wasn’t just the twelve apostles who received this gift, just those who had been part of the inner circle of Jesus’ followers. No, it was a much larger group than just twelve men. It included others besides, those whose names we don’t know. It included women. I expect it included the very old and the very young. The Spirit was poured out upon all gathered in that room, irrespective of status or gender or age or preparation. The gift was given to all there.

And that gift, it made them ready for anything. Really, it did. They may not have always felt that they were ready. They may have felt worry or even fear at some of the anythings that came their way. But they were ready. For God that day gave them the full blessing of God’s own presence and power, making them ready for anything they may encounter as Christ’s witnesses. They could speak. They could act. They could do. They could move. They could love. They could forgive. They could do all this, not by their own power alone, but because they had been given the gift.

And so it can be for us. I’m speaking to all of you, of course, but I again want to make clear that I have you younger people especially in mind. You, too, my young friends, can be ready for anything, for all those things that come about in your living and doing as a follower of Jesus. Because if you have been given the gift of faith in Jesus, and have received the sign of that gift in baptism, then the Spirit is with you.

Sure, there may be times (perhaps many times) when you will walk apart from the Spirit, when you’ll close your ears to the Spirit, when you forget to rely on the Spirit, or when you’ll live in willful ignorance of the Spirit’s direction as shown in scripture. But even so, please do not forget this: the Spirit has been given to you, too, and with the Spirit you have received all you need to be Christ’s servant, to share with all of us here in making a difference in the world by living out the message of Jesus.
You see, the Spirit is not only for the adults. The Spirit is not only for professionals. The gifts of the Spirit are not confined to the admired or the trained. You have been given those gifts as well. You, too, have the ability, and the responsibility, to make a difference in this church, and, from here outward, in the world. Indeed, we all do.

For the Spirit moves in surprising directions. The Spirit is poured out, blazing with divine love and truth and power. For the followers of Jesus, the Spirit must be relied on, but can never be presumed upon. The Spirit will take you, it will take all of us, by surprise. Above all, in the midst of our busy lives, the Spirit can, and will, make us ready for anything.