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Acts 2:1-47

Learner Session Guide

Focus Statement

The Spirit that anointed Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor and release to the captives is poured out on an international group of Jews in Jerusalem. The gift to speak in other languages signals the fulfillment of God's promise to restore Israel and gather the nations into the covenant community of God's people.

Key Verse

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear." *Acts 2:32-33*

The Spirit Creates Community

Focus Image



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Gather

Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group and give a special welcome to newcomers. Today we begin our study of Acts with the story of Pentecost and the founding of the early church. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims from nations far and near would have been gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. When the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit, people are able to understand them in their own languages.

Pray

Almighty and ever-living God, you fulfilled the promise of Easter by sending the gift of your Holy Spirit. Look upon your people gathered in prayer, open to receive the Spirit's flame. May it come to rest in our hearts and heal the divisions of word and tongue, that with one voice and one song we may praise your name in joy and thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Prayer of the Day for Vigil of Pentecost, ELW p. 36)

Focus Activity

The Focus Image is a depiction of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The people in this picture respond to the Spirit's

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activity in their midst in a variety of ways. Briefly describe these responses. Which person's face or response best describes your own experience of the Spirit?

Open Scripture

Read Acts 2:1-47.

- As you listen to the passage, what words or phrases speak to you?
- How is the activity of the Spirit described in this text?
- What questions does this raise for you?

Join the Conversation

Literary Context

1. The Acts of the Apostles is the second volume of a two-volume work that includes the Gospel of Luke. Acts tells the story of how the ministry of Jesus continues and is extended through the community of followers after his resurrection and ascension. The major themes in Luke are developed in Acts through the stories of faithful followers of Jesus who have been empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to his resurrection, which sets in motion the restoration of Israel and the nations.

- Acts opens with a scene of the risen Jesus reminding his disciples that “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). Read Acts 1:6-8. What is the role and purpose of the Spirit that is poured out on Jesus’ followers on Pentecost?

2. The theme of Israel’s restoration frames Luke’s story of Jesus, and the hope that the risen Jesus would now “restore the kingdom to Israel” is repeated in the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6.

- Reread Acts 2:1-47 and identify some signs of restoration in the relationships between the Jews and God and among one another.

3. Bearing witness to the risen Jesus is another important theme and activity in Acts. Peter says, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are *witnesses*” (2:32). Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost speak in other languages about “God’s deeds of power” (2:11).

- What does it mean to bear witness to Jesus’ resurrection today? Brainstorm a list of practical ways you might bear witness to the risen Jesus in your congregation and in your life.

4. Repentance is another major theme in the Gospel of Luke and in Acts. The call to repentance is a call to consider what changes we need to make to live in accordance with God’s life-giving purposes.

- Read Luke 3:7-14 and Acts 2:37-42. Compare and contrast John’s baptism of repentance in Luke with Peter’s call for repentance in Acts.
- What would repentance look like for us? How would it affect our habits of thought and action?
- What specific attitudes and practices might we adopt if we were to take seriously Peter’s admonition to “save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40)?

Historical Context

1. Acts has much in common with ancient historical writings. These ancient writings were not simply reports of what had happened. Acts not only tells about Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection; it also shows that these events happened according to God’s purposes. So in speaking of the historical event of Jesus’ crucifixion, Peter says: “This man, handed over to you *according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law” (Acts 2:23).

- From a strictly historical perspective, all those listening to Peter’s Pentecost sermon could not have been responsible for Jesus’ execution. What is the significance of implicating everyone in the audience? What does that mean for us?

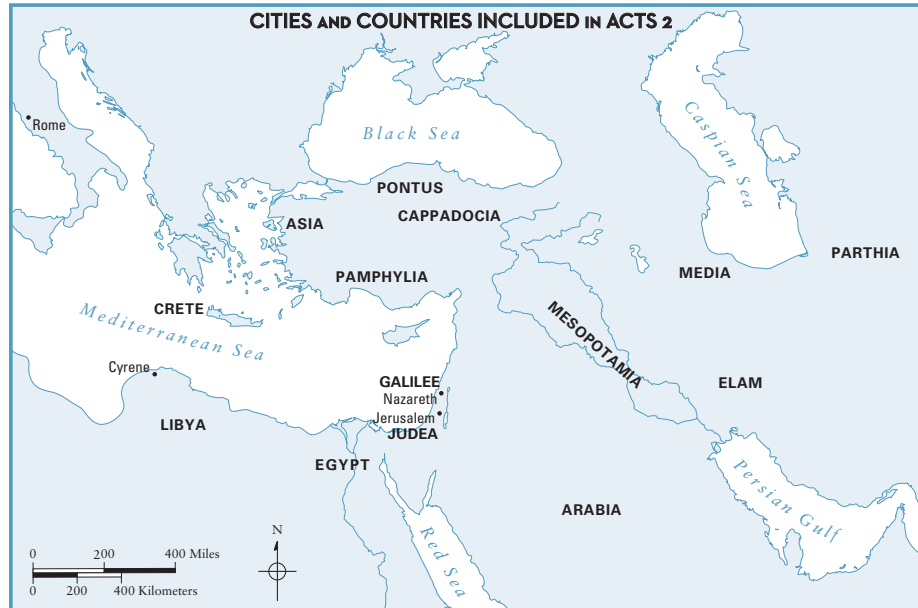
2. Acts 2:41-47 is one of the earliest descriptions of the pattern of life followed by believers in Jerusalem. Followers of the risen Jesus who were baptized “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” and “had all things in common.” The word “fellowship” in Greek is *koinonia*. It was used frequently in Greco-Roman society to depict a profound sharing among friends who had all things in common.



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- Reflect on ways your congregation reflects the pattern of life together in Christ described in Acts 2:41-47. Also think about some new ways your congregation might embody this countercultural pattern of life.

Lutheran Context

1. A guiding principle of Lutheran biblical interpretation is *Scripture interprets Scripture*. This conviction is evident throughout Acts, which uses passages from the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) to illuminate what is happening in the narrative. When people are filled with the Spirit and speak in other languages, Peter explains this in his Pentecost sermon by interpreting a passage from the prophet Joel.

- Read Acts 2:14-18 and Joel 2:28-29. What is the role of the Spirit in our attempts to interpret Scripture? How would you envision a fulfillment of such an outpouring of the Spirit in a Lutheran congregation today?
- Not just some but all people can be filled with the Spirit and endowed with gifts for witness and service. In line with this, Martin Luther emphasized that the vocation or calling of all the baptized is to serve and witness to Christ. How would we approach ministry and mission differently if we acted on the conviction that the Spirit works through people who hold different religious and political views and come from very different social and ethnic backgrounds?

2. Another important principle for Lutherans in interpreting the Bible is the relationship between *law* and *gospel*. Pentecost was originally a harvest festival, but it came to be associated with the giving of the law to Moses and the people. The Torah, or law, served as the basis for Jewish identity and moral order and therefore provided a sense of security and stability. However, the Spirit is depicted as divine energy that creates, inspires, restores, and empowers. It is unpredictable and uncontrollable and typically disrupts the status quo.

- Recall a time when you experienced the unsettling activity of the Spirit in your life. How did you respond?

Devotional Context

1. All who have been baptized into Christ have received the Spirit, but that is often regarded as a very personal and even private reality. The Pentecost story depicts the Spirit acting in very public ways.

- What does the session Scripture text have to say about the work of the Spirit in the world, the nation, the community, and your congregation?
- Reflect on what this text may be saying to you about new possibilities for living in the Spirit.

2. Historically, believers have used a variety of spiritual or faith practices, such as praying, worshiping, reading and studying the Bible, witnessing, serving, and giving in their efforts to live according to the Spirit. In Acts 2:1-47 being filled with the Spirit and a communal pattern of life are inextricably connected.

- What are some faith practices that would nurture your congregation's life together in the Spirit and empower you for witness and service?

Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

Pray

*Perplexing, Pentecostal God,
you infuse us with your Spirit,
urging us to vision and dream.
May the gift of your presence
find voice in our lives,
that our babbling may be transformed into discernment
and the flickering of many tongues
light an unquenchable fire of compassion and justice. Amen.
(Revised Common Lectionary Prayers, Augsburg Fortress, 2002)*



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Extending the Conversation

Homework

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Acts 4:1-37.
2. Have a conversation with a member of your group or another person you know. Talk about how you see the Spirit at work in that person's life.
3. The call to repentance is not so much about regret or remorse as it is an invitation to reorient our habits of thought and action so that we can live in harmony with the Spirit. To repent is to contemplate what needs to change for us to live in the power of the Spirit. Make a list of some specific attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors you would like to change to bear witness to the risen Jesus in your life.

Enrichment

1. If you wish to read through the entire book of Acts during this unit, read the following sections this week:

Day 1: Acts 1:1-14

Day 2: Acts 1:15-26

Day 3: Acts 2:1-36

Day 4: Acts 2:37-47

Day 5: Acts 3:1-26

Day 6: Acts 4:1-22

Day 7: Acts 4:23-37

2. Throughout the Gospel of Luke and Acts, the Spirit works through Jesus and his followers to overcome boundaries and barriers for the sake of restoring people to community. In the Pentecost story the Spirit even overcomes the communication barrier of different languages. As you go about your week, pay close attention to the barriers that obstruct communication and community. Note instances where you see the Spirit at work in transcending obstacles to reconnect people to God and to one another.
3. The story of Pentecost is a story of people being filled and empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to the risen Jesus. As you go through the week, make note of the various ways power is expressed, especially in interpersonal relations. How is living in the power of the Spirit different from other kinds of personal, social, or political power? Be prepared to share some of your observations with the group at the next session.
4. Watch this dramatic and visual performance of the Pentecost story in Acts 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOm1DMZJITs>.

How does this performance of the text impact the way you read and understand it?

For Further Reading

Introduction to Acts and notes on Acts 2:1-47 in *Lutheran Study Bible* (Augsburg Fortress, 2009), *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HarperOne, 2006), or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

The Acts of the Apostles, by Luke Timothy Johnson. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992, pp. 41-63.

To Every Nation under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles, by Howard Clark Kee. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997, pp. 43-55.



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