

BACK TO NORMAL... BACK TO PNEUMA
The Holy Spirit – The Gift of Understanding
May 23, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Acts:

The book of Acts is written by Luke, a physician and a close friend and travelling companion of Paul, who was an eyewitness to the birth and growth of the early church. It is as a sequel to his Gospel and its purpose is to be an accurate historical record of the early church, a theological book on the work of the Holy Spirit and on relationships between Christians in the Church with the results of living out God's love and grace, and an apologetic work of building a strong case for the validity of Christ's claim and promises. The book begins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem leading to its eventual spread to Rome, covering most of the Roman Empire. The Gospel was first preached to the Jews but very few received it and due to the continual rejection of it by the majority of them, it began to be preached to the Gentiles and this was in accordance with the plan of God. The book's narrative follows the pattern that Jesus gave to the apostles to be his witnesses in Jerusalem (chapters 1 – 7), in Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 and following), and to the ends of the earth (chapters 11, 13 and following till the end). The first half of the book focuses primarily on Peter in Jerusalem and adjoining areas in Palestine and the second half on Paul in his missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. They and their companions took the

Gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles with some Jews and many Gentiles believing with joy, starting new churches, and new believers growing in the Christian life. The book was written to one named Theophilus and to all lovers of God between AD 63 and 70. A key verse of this book is: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).

– Adapted from The Life Application Bible, p. 1940.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Acts 2:1-21 NRSV

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above

and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

This Week:

The first believers, including the apostles, were gathered together in Jerusalem that day which was the day of the Jewish festival of Pentecost but that Pentecost was a day which God purposed to be special, the day which after his death and resurrection and before his ascension into heaven, Jesus told his disciples to wait for heavenly power to come on them. And from that Pentecost onwards the Holy Spirit has been given to all those who believe in Christ as their Savior and Lord just as it was for the first believers. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the Church was born because nothing can be truer than the fact that without the Holy Spirit there is no Christian living and no life of the Church. This is because we can only be a follower of Christ and belong to him by receiving the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Jesus, as the Book of Acts puts it. This has been the promise and purpose of God from centuries before and declared through the Jewish prophets of old – the giving of God's Spirit to all who believe and not just for a few specially chosen ones as in Old Testament times.

So what happened that day was the giving of a new quality of life never experienced before. For the crowds in Jerusalem's streets, these people on whom the Spirit had come made sense to them. Whether the miracle occurred in the mouths of the speakers or in the ears of the hearers, scholars debate to this day; perhaps it was both. But the more important miracle was that there was understanding, true communication. This miracle is of the Holy Spirit and it still occurs every time we hear, really hear and understand, what someone else is saying. Every time we get across what we mean, leaping out of our isolation to touch soul to soul. This will only happen when the Spirit dwells within us for only then we will have the ability to 'speak one another's language'. The building of bridges across generations where generation-gaps exist which really would be communication-gaps, an expression of building bridges is our Senior Sunday held today, or across social backgrounds, an expression of building bridges is the planned International Sunday to be held in August, is no less a miracle than the dramatic miracle of crossing foreign cultures by supernaturally speaking a foreign language as it happened on that Day of Pentecost.

Apart from the miracle of understanding for the crowds, on that Pentecost Day the Church was born in an explosive manner and grew in leaps and bounds as recorded in the Book of Acts because the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers of Jesus giving them a unity based upon an understanding of who God is and what he has done, is doing and will do. On that Day of Pentecost when the Church was born, the numbers went from 120 to about 3000, all belonging together in Christ. The unity of Christ's Church is celebrated worldwide today with the giving of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gave birth to the Church and still sustains it to continue to live and grow in spite of pushbacks from outside and weakness within. So the Holy Spirit is given to us that we may be more like Jesus and that we may be his witnesses to others in word and deed.

The ultimate purpose of the giving of the Holy Spirit in such a special way on that Day of Pentecost and ever since whenever anyone truly believes and receives Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord is for having a new quality of life that creates a new humanity and community. The blessing of Pentecost reversed the curse of Babel with the gift of understanding but this gift did not diminish the diversity of the great crowd; the people did not cease to be Medes, Persians, Elamites, etc. They were not reduced to some vague generality without past or place. No, they did not become less than what they were, they became more than they had been, for they became one with all those who heard and understood that God was alive in this world and eager that they, all of them, should participate in his purposes. In the same way, coming out of the pandemic we return to normalcy but let us do that in a new way – Back to Normal...but Back to Pneuma. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on the believers to write God's Law on their hearts and no longer to remain on stone and to overcome human differences and unite them to receive and share the gift of understanding to the unbelieving diverse crowds with the Gospel of Christ so that there would be a greater harvest than of barley, the harvest of lives for God's Kingdom. Let us celebrate today once again that gift to them and to us and let us pray that what transformed them may transform us, and with us the world for God. Let us ask God to fill us anew with the Holy Spirit and help us experience a personal Pentecost.

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. How was the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, and ever since that day different from the way the Holy Spirit came before as mentioned in the Old Testament? What is the significance of the difference?

2. Have you experienced in your life the Holy Spirit as the gift of understanding when you have truly 'listened to understand' another and 'spoken to be understood' by another?
3. As we slowly return to normalcy of life having come through the pandemic, in what ways do you think you can go 'Back to Pneuma'?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Acts 2:7-8,11 NRSV
⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ¹¹ ...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."
3. Prayerfully approach God in asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit so as to be renewed in faith in Christ and to continue to be transformed with the gift of understanding toward others.