

BACK TO NORMAL... BACK TO PNEUMA
Running On All Cylinders
May 30, 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 2:42-47 NRSV

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 24:24-25 NIV

²⁴ Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

This Week:

On the day of Pentecost, because of the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Church was born which is the new community confessing faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. This new community of love and understanding made up of transformed individuals were united together in their Spirit-filled love for God and love for each other as they came together as one while at the same time recognizing and celebrating each one's identity. As a result their lives became an example and attraction to others around them and more were added to their numbers daily. They were a new people of God who had a definite eternal destiny that they were moving forward to, a goal that they pressed towards which was to be more like the one they believed in and followed, to belong to God's Kingdom purposes, to

wait for and meet with Christ when he would return, and to share this good news in word and deed that others also could be a part.

To be this community of faithful believers in Christ, they were committed to the practice of devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles about Jesus and God's Kingdom, to meeting together in fellowship to encourage each other in faith, to share the meal of love as given by Jesus to remember his sacrifice for salvation, and to pray for each other and with each other. These practices were made into a regular habit so that they would commit themselves to it to grow in their discipleship of Christ although it was not always easy and comfortable. Their faith and spirituality was not merely ritual but also expressed in daily living even as they lived among people who were driven by the worldly standards of personal gain and convenience. Although there were many from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds who believed and received the Gospel of Christ, there were also those who when confronted by it did not commit themselves because of their desire for seeking what was convenient for them in their lives. An example of this is the Roman Governor Felix before whom Paul stood defending himself against the charge of being a defiler of Judaism and causing trouble and unrest among the people. Although Paul was on trial, he took the opportunity to share with Felix the good news about Jesus but Felix did not accept the message of Paul and stated that he would hear him when convenient. Felix's heart and mind was set on worldly gain to the extent that he expected to receive a bribe from Paul so as to be dealt with favorably.

The community of faith in Christ, the Church, can only continue to be a people with a purpose when depending on and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians devote themselves to the spiritual practices of prayer and reading/studying the Scripture, worship and fellowship, giving to the needs of others, caring for and serving others, and sharing with others the good news of Christ. This is not a matter of convenience but of commitment and as long as it is so there will always be progress made toward the goal, for otherwise the Christian life will be that of going in circles and getting nowhere. These habits of the community of commitment to Christ will also be the means of experiencing more of God's grace and receiving more of the Holy Spirit's power by which the community will spiritually flourish, running on all cylinders.

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. What do you think would have been the challenges the early Christians faced during their time so as to be a community of commitment to Christ rather than convenience?
2. Have you been pressed by the ways and demands of the world that have caused you at times to consider convenience over commitment in your Christian discipleship? What would they have been?
3. In which area of practice of Christian commitment (P.E.A.C.E. – Prayer, Engagement/Presence, Abundance/Gifts, Compassionate Caring / Service, and Evangel / Witness) do you feel you need to work on with the Holy Spirit's help and the prayer support of your small group?

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 2:42 NRSV
⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
3. Prayerfully approach God in asking to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit so that you would faithfully follow Christ by being devoted to spiritual practices and habits of Christian commitment.