

Bible Study Notes

Pentecost – the Gift of the Holy Spirit!

5/26/20

Passages: (all NRSV)

- Acts Chapter 2 (primary)
- John 20:19-23

This week's subject is the fulfilment of God's promise of the Holy Spirit in the event we now call Pentecost. The primary reading for this sacred story is Acts Chapter 2. This is a long reading. I saw no way to cut it short without diminishing the incredible importance of this event.

Part of the importance of this week's passage is to understand what happened through Luke's eyes. Luke is probably the most eloquent of the Gospels, the Book of Acts can be seen as a "Part 2" of the Gospel of Luke. In this passage Luke gives us a dramatic and detailed account of these events. Every thing that is in Luke's story is there with a meaning.

The Book of Acts is the only Book which focuses intently on the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of John does talk to the arrival of the Holy Spirit but is very brief and incorporates it into the Great Commission.

I suggest that you read both passages. They do not contradict each other, but they do tell the story from different perspectives.

My notes below are directed at the Acts reading.

Acts 2:1-3

1When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

- There were three pilgrimage feasts in Biblical times: 1) Passover, 2) "Weeks" or Pentecost, 3) Tabernacles, Tents or Booths. This event coincided when many devout Jews from distant nations would have returned to Jerusalem.
- Luke does not record the Holy Spirit being either wind or flame – just that it appeared that way.

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Acts 2:4-11

4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

- Luke records that as the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit that they began to speak in other languages. Reflect on these points:
 - The speaking in other languages described here is not the same as Paul’s “speaking in tongues”. All of these believers are being given the gift to speak in another language to be able to proclaim the wonders and love of God. Or in this translation “*in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power*”. The term “speaking” here is actual “proclaiming” Going back to Luke’s version of the Great Commission (Luke 24:46-48) Proclaiming is what Jesus commissioned His followers to be doing when they received the Holy Spirit. Paul’s speaking in tongues is given only to a few and the purpose is for Christian formation.
 - Galileans were notorious for not having linguistic talent. Luke records them gaining this ability through the power and Presence of the Holy Spirit. What is interesting is that the gift of the Holy Spirit does not “polish” or transcend the Galileans manner of speaking. The crowd recognized their accent and manner of speech as being Galilean – not the same as the language they were speaking. The Holy Spirit works through us as we are – not as someone else. We are inspired to do God’s work in our own way, in our own voices.
 - Luke records all of these nations as a way to emphasize the mission of going to all nations.

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Acts 2:12-36

12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

13But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

14But 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.

15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

16No, 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. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19And I will show portents in the heaven

above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20The sun shall

be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. 21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

22“*You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man*

attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— 23*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. 24But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because

it was impossible for him to be held in its power. 25For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;

26therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. 27For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience

corruption. 28You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

29“*Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both*

died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants

on his throne. 31Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

32This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. 33Being 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. 34For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right

hand, 35until I make your enemies your footstool.”’ 36Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus

whom you crucified.”.

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- The crowd's reaction to the speaking of God's wonders is confusion, "perplexed" in this translation. Out of that confusion they discount it as drunken talk. This sets up the preaching by Peter.
- Peter's preaching was of a style to convert. It is not about doing acts of kindness, etc, but strictly about turning towards God, repenting and being baptized.
- Peter was taking advantage of the dramatic miracle of the arrival of the Holy Spirit to convince the crowd that Jesus was the Messiah, that God fulfilled His promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that God was faithful in His promise to save the world from sin and death - therefore it made sense to "repent and be baptized" now.
- This sermon or speech can be thought of as a missionary speech.

Acts 2:37-41

37Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." 40And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

- Luke records the crowd as responding to Peter's convincing arguments by turning from their comments about drunkenness and making a sincere request by asking "what should they do?".
- Peter then proclaims repentance and the forgiveness of sins, again echoing Luke 24:46-48. He reinforces God's faithfulness in His promise of the gift of the holy Spirit.
- An unspoken question is about the crowd wanting to know if God would give them a second chance. Earlier in this chapter Peter had chastised them for crucifying Jesus, so: would God forgive them in spite of this?

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Acts 2:42-47

42They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46Day 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, 47praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

- This section points to the ideal state of believers all having a common spiritual life.
- Luke also records the believer community as being totally focused towards the mission: to spread the Good News and bring others to Christ.
- This section also documents God's faithfulness and the awesome power of the Holy Spirit working in the believer community.

Closing Comments

As you study the sacred story of the gift of the Holy Spirit I invite you to think, reflect and discern how these insights, and any additional ones that come to you, can help you in your own faith journey.

Here are some closing points:

- The arrival of the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event, it is an ongoing event as people turn to God.
- The Holy Spirit is not reserved for the few, special followers. It is God's gift to all believers.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is not a personal gift, it is the same Holy Spirit to comes to all believers. Each of us may receive different gifts FROM the Holy Spirit, but it is the SAME Holy Spirit.

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Next week:

- To be determined

John 20:19-23 (NRSV)

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."