

Bible study on Acts 2.1-21

Begin with an opening prayer

Lord, help us to look out and listen for your Holy Spirit.

May we welcome you with open hearts and minds.

Call us, inspire us, surprise us and challenge us.

Give us confidence and calm assurance.

Lead us to your power and love.

Amen.

Read the passage

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, was originally a harvest festival, but by the time of Jesus – and now – it celebrates God's covenant with Israel and the giving of the Law. There are echoes of the Sinai story in Luke's references to 'wind' and 'fire' (cf Exodus 19.16-20). He pictures the disciples' experience as a shared vision from heaven, strong enough to send them out onto the street, where Jewish Pentecost pilgrims hear and understand what they are saying. But what does it all mean (v.12)?

Luke's opening (the Greek of verse 2 reads: 'when the day of Pentecost had been fulfilled') implies that this strange cacophony fulfils John the Baptist's words and Jesus' promise to the disciples (Luke 3.16; Acts 1.5,8). Peter's speech reaches much further back, to the prophet Joel's 800-year-old announcement of a dramatic outpouring of God's Spirit to restore Israel's fortunes after a plague of locusts and drought (Joel 2.28ff). Luke alters Joel's 'afterwards' (2.28) to 'In the last days' (v.17). Israel's hopes for a bright new future have arrived on a Jerusalem street at Pentecost, just weeks after the dark days of Passover. Notice the Pentecostal blend of diversity and unity (vv.1,3,5,8). God's new creation is anything but bland.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The reading from Acts goes ‘over the top’ in its description of the effects of the Spirit – and with good reason. Peter and others were acting with great confidence and boldness, people were understanding things in their own languages. But are the effects of the Spirit always like this? The Epistle says the Spirit ‘helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought’ and ‘intercedes for the saints’. The Gospel reading speaks of the Spirit as an ‘Advocate’ and ‘the Spirit of truth’. Could it be a bit of both, or sometimes one and sometimes the other? After all the Spirit can surprise us – can’t it?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- What do you see in this picture?
- When have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit?
- How might God’s Spirit be prompting you to care for creation?

Prayer

Lord, for tomorrow’s world,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.

Lord, for today’s world,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.

Lord, for our world and our lives,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Holy Spirit, send us out.

Gentle Spirit, calm our fears.

Spirit of truth, lead us to a broader vision of your work.

Spirit of strength, in our weaknesses, make us strong.

Spirit of power, show us when and how to act for you.

Holy Spirit, send us out.

Amen.