



Devotional Guide

Introduction

Pentecost is one of the most important days of the Christian calendar; this year, it will be celebrated on Sunday, May 31.

Our celebration of Pentecost commemorates the time when the Apostles had a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit that inspired them and led to the extraordinary growth of the church. This experience was preceded by ten days of prayer and waiting, covering the time between the ascension of Jesus (commemorated this year on Thursday, May 31) to Pentecost.

As we approach Pentecost, we, too, can wait and pray. And perhaps we, too, will find new hope and inspiration during the Pentecost season.

Listen/Read

This study guide is based on the Story of Pentecost audio recording which is available at faithandenterprise.org/pentecost We recommend that you listen to it, whether as an individual or a group, and then use the following questions as a starting point for your own reflection and prayer. If you prefer to read the story, a transcript with scripture references is attached.

Prayer

You can begin with a brief prayer. One example might be:

Lord God, thank you for this day. Help me to listen to the story of Pentecost and to hear how it might apply to me. Amen.

Reflection Questions

After listening to the Story of Pentecost, sit silently for a minute or two and then consider the following questions:

- 1) How do you think waiting and praying for ten days might have contributed to the experience of the Apostles? Do you think it might have opened them to the experience of the Holy Spirit in some way?
- 2) Do you think that what Luke describes as “a sound like the rush of a violent wind” was a real sound? Or was it a description of a spiritual experience of some sort?

- 3) Does this story remind you of any experience in your life?
- 4) The Apostles waited and prayed, were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and then headed back into the world. How might you apply this pattern to your own life and work.
- 5) It could be a powerful experience to, like the Apostles, be intentional about praying each day leading up to Pentecost. If you were to follow their example, how and when would you plan to pray?"

Closing Prayer

After considering these questions, you are invited to sit quietly and reflect for a few minutes, and then close with a brief prayer of your own.

The Story of Pentecost

Transcript

Recorded by Rob Tribken

Pentecost is one of the most important events of the Christian calendar, and it's only a few days away.

Like many of the great stories of the Bible, the Story of Pentecost says something important about God and our relationship with God – and this applies not just to Biblical times, but today as well.

It also speaks to us of hope and the presence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

What we know about Pentecost comes from Luke, the author of both the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. It is from Luke that we hear that after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead, he spent forty days on earth teaching his apostles.

At the end of the forty days, Jesus met with these apostles on the Mount of Olives. They listened as Jesus instructed them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. According to Luke, they then saw Jesus ascend to heaven, bringing an end to his visible activity in the world.¹

The apostles followed these instructions and stayed in Jerusalem; they waited in what became known as the upper room. As they waited, they devoted themselves to prayer.²

Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles experienced the Spirit of God in a powerful new way. Pentecost, also known at the time as the Festival of Weeks, was one of the major Jewish pilgrimage festivals; Jerusalem was crowded and the streets were packed as the Apostles prayed inside the upper room.

Here is what Luke says about their experience, from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2:

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?³

Luke goes on to say that as the inspired and spirit-filled apostles left the room and began preaching to the large crowds in the street, the impact was extraordinary; about 3000 people were converted and baptized on that one day.⁴

Fifty years later, Luke and his sources remembered Pentecost and the days that followed as a time of extraordinary spiritual activity. There is a sense of hope and joy and amazement in the accounts, much of it centered on Peter. It is almost as though the apostles, and especially Peter, had become one with the Spirit. Luke expresses this in several ways, for example:

- A sense of awe came upon the crowds because of the "wonders and signs" performed by God through the apostles.⁵
- Crowds of people were brought to Peter to be healed. The shadow of Peter passing in the street was said to have healing power.⁶
- The religious authorities tried to constrain Peter and the others, but not even prison could hold them.⁷

Many of the new converts appear to have been diaspora Jews – foreign language speakers who had returned to Jerusalem from the distant cities of the diaspora, either to visit the festival or to become residents.

These diaspora Jews played an essential role in the events that followed. Not too long after Pentecost, Stephen, their leader, was stoned to death by the religious authorities for proclaiming his loyalty to Jesus rather than to the Temple establishment. On the same day that Stephen was killed, a severe persecution was begun against the other followers of Jesus. Many fled Jerusalem and dispersed through Judea and Samaria⁸ and then back into the diaspora, returning to the Roman cities surrounding the eastern Mediterranean and to the cities of the Parthian empire to the east. There they spread the word and began forming new communities of Jesus followers.

The worldwide Christian movement had begun.

I think there is an important pattern here. The apostles waited and prayed for ten days. Then, on Pentecost, they had an extraordinary experience of the Holy Spirit. Following this, they headed out into the world, inspired, and began spreading the word.

I think that we too can follow this pattern. We can pray and wait, and then, perhaps inspired, head back out into the world. This does not mean that we are necessarily

going to experience something as dramatic as the Apostles did, of course, but if we pay attention, we might find that we develop a deeper sense of hope and a more powerful sense of mission.

As we approach the day of Pentecost, I encourage you to spend some time each day waiting and praying. You can pray however you like, whether a prayer of gratitude, of petition, of hope, or maybe something else. You could also pray a few verses from the Psalms, or think about Jesus or think about the Apostles in the upper room as you pray. Or you could just sit in silence with your attention turned towards God.

Pray in whatever way feels best to you, as together we wait for Pentecost.

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¹ Acts 1:3-10.

² Acts 1:12-14.

³ Acts 2:1-8.

⁴ Acts 2:41.

⁵ Acts 2:43.

⁶ Acts 5:14-16.

⁷ Acts 5:17-20.

⁸ Acts 7:54-8:1.