

Lectionary Guide for Acts 2:1-21 and John 7:37-39

Acts 2:1-21

Luke tells us that on Pentecost devout Jews gathered together. Then suddenly from heaven they heard the sound of violent wind, felt as though tongues became divided, flames appeared around them. They were “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Strangely, everyone there began to speak in foreign tongues –*but* be understood by each other! (Judeans, Galileans, Near Easterners, North Africans, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and others) They asked, “*What does this mean?*” (v. 12b) *are they drunk with new wine?* Peter with the eleven answered in the negative, using scripture to prove that what had been predicted was coming to pass. According to the Prophet Joel, in the last days, God’s Spirit would be poured on all people...so, strange human and natural acts would take place. But any who called on God’s name would be saved.

Five Questions

1. Peter, the eleven and other Judeans gathered for their annual Pentecost, fifty days after Passover. Known also as the Feast of Weeks, it celebrated the Giving of the Ten Commandments by Moses to God’s people. In this passage, might Luke be trying to show a parallel between the giving of the earlier Law to the pouring out of a new Law?
2. On this particular Pentecost, according to Luke, strange events occurred. Peter, who was becoming the leader to the eleven, was convinced that all these signs, predicted by the earlier prophets and Jesus Christ, confirmed that the End Time had arrived. Re-read Acts 2:17-21, which adapts the Prophet Joel’s original words (2:28-32), and listen for the unsettling yet powerful words of the Son of Man returning in his glory.
3. Our lection mentions fire, for example, divided tongues as of fire...with each flame resting on those gathered. Can we recall when fire was used in Scripture to mark God’s presence? What about the burning bush, God’s descent on Mt. Sinai, Daniel’s fiery chariot, or John the Baptist’s comment that he baptized with water but one after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit with fire? (Luke 3:16, Acts 2:38)
4. When Luke described the proliferation of languages, we cannot help but recall the Genesis story about the Tower of Babel when the (imagined and idealized) one common human language was fragmented – to account for many different

“foreign” languages. So, this Pentecost story (with people speaking different languages but understanding each other) may intend to counter Babel (*babbling*) with a new language of the Holy Spirit. Are there any stories about language -- your experience with languages spoken in families, learned in school or used in our community—which pertain to the Pentecost story?

5. What does this new language of the Holy Spirit mean to us? What does the Holy Spirit point to as we begin to enter “phase 1” of our recovery from a devastating health pandemic? How can we have confidence as Christ’s “witnesses” and still serve others?

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John 7:37-39

The Evangelist John says that on the final day, the great day, of the Festival (of Booths or Tabernacles) Jesus was present. The Spirit would come when Jesus’ authority was felt, and those who believed in him would gather. Christ said, let any who are thirsty come; let those who believe in him drink; and let those same open their “believers’ hearts to living waters.” But John warned, Jesus had not yet been glorified (lifted up) – so there was no Spirit yet.

Five Questions

1. Though the Festival of Booths was originally a celebration of the completion of Solomon’s Temple, it later came to be identified with the hope for a time when God’s life-giving powers would flow out of the Temple like rivers. (Joel 3:18) As such, its rituals included water and light. Today does this image of God as the source of living waters still hold meaning for us? Can you give an example?

2. John tells us that Jesus was present on the “great day” when a water libation ceremony was enacted in the Temple. Typically John-like, the writer has Jesus become the water itself, like the water of life that was later offered to the Samaritan woman (4:14 (recall also, Baptism by water and the Holy Spirit, Jesus turning water into wine, Nicodemus being born of water and Spirit, living waters and wellsprings). Name hymns and spirituals that identify God/Jesus as water.

3. Apparently, 7:38 “Out of [his] heart shall flow rivers of living water” in the KJV might also be translated as “out of [the believer’s] heart shall flow rivers of living water” in the NRSV, which we use. Given what we know about the Evangelist John and his writing style, which translation do you prefer? Why?

4. Commentators say that John Chapter 7 holds more references to Jesus' arrest, death and glorification. We see this in the final verse of our lection. It says that at the time of the writing of this Gospel, the Spirit had not yet been given. But it seems to know, we know, that the Spirit would be given.

5. As we leave behind Eastertide for Pentecost, we are asked to be faithful disciples and cultivate hearts from which rivers of living water may flow. Say a collect, a one-sentence prayer, to God asking that the Holy Spirit come to you to create a yearning and vision for a new world.

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