

Bible Challenge June 4-10, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

Today's festival derives its name from the Jewish festival of Pentecost, observed fifty days after Passover. On the fiftieth day of Easter we celebrate the Holy Spirit as the power of God among us that heals, forgives, inspires, and unites. In the reading from Acts, images of wind and fire describe the Spirit poured out on disciples of all nations. In John's gospel the risen Christ breathes the Spirit on his followers on Easter evening. In the one Spirit we are baptized into one body, and at the Lord's table the Spirit unites us for witness in the world.

DAY ONE: Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival that marked the fiftieth day after Passover. Luke portrays the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the disciples before the gathered and astonished people assembled in Jerusalem for the festival. Filled with the Spirit, the disciples were able to witness to the power of Christ's resurrection.

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] 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. 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." 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: ¹⁷In 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."

Adventure Challenge: Acts 2.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Use the on-line Jewish Encyclopedia or other references to research how and why Pentecost (Ḥag Shabu'ot) is celebrated by Jews.

Option B: Research the place names in verses 9-11, to see where all these people were from, and the context for the phrase *devout Jews from every nation under heaven*.

Option C: Read Joel 2, the source of Peter's quotation. (Note: Peter was quoting from the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew scriptures, with a few modifications.)

DAY TWO: Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

How wonderful are the works of the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord as long as I live!

²⁴How manifold are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.
²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
 with its swarms too many to number,
 living things both small and great.
²⁶There go the ships to and fro,
 and Leviathan, which you made for the sport of it.
²⁷All of them look to you
 to give them their food in due season.
²⁸You give it to them; they gather it;
 you open your hand, and they are filled with good things.
²⁹When you hide your face, they are terrified;
 when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
³⁰You send forth your Spirit, and they are created;
 and so you renew the face of the earth.
³¹May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
 O LORD, rejoice in all your works.
³²You look at the earth and it trembles;
 you touch the mountains and they smoke.
³³I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will praise my God while I have my being.
³⁴May these words of mine please God.
 I will rejoice in the LORD.
^{35b}Bless the LORD, O my soul.
 Hallelujah!

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 104

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Research *Leviathan*.

Option B: Consider how this psalm might be written from a twenty-first century understanding of creation and the universe: What might a modern-day writer change or add? What verses would remain the same?

DAY THREE: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Paul is helping the Corinthians understand the relationship between our God-given unity and Spirit-created diversity. The Spirit creates the unity of faith and gives all Christians diverse gifts for the common benefit of all. We need one another's diverse spiritual gifts, because the same Spirit has given them to each person for the common good.

^{3b}No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 12.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: This passage is often cited to explain why a church like Advent needs a variety of people with different gifts. Do you think it could also be used to explain why there are (and perhaps need to be) different Christian churches and denominations?

Option B: Compare the list of spiritual gifts in verses 8-10 with the lists of spiritual gifts in verses 28-31; Romans 12:6-8, and 1 Peter 4:10-11. Do you see differences?

DAY FOUR: John 7:37-39

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as living water, quenching the thirst of all who come to him and filling the hearts of believers till they overflow.

³⁷On the last day of the festival [of Booths], the great day, while Jesus was standing [in the temple], he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Adventure Challenge: John 7.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Research *the Festival of Booths*.

Option B: Read Zechariah 14, a scripture that is read at the Festival of Booths; Zechariah 14:8 is a possible source for the saying quoted in verse 38.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, on this day you open the hearts of your faithful people by sending into us your Holy Spirit. Direct us by the light of that Spirit, that we may have a right judgment in all things and rejoice at all times in your peace, through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Adventure Challenge: Acts describes the Holy Spirit as tongues of flame; how would you describe your experiences of the Holy Spirit?

Explorer Challenge: Pentecost is sometimes understood as the New Testament response to or reversal of the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11:1-9); re-read the Day One passage and the Tower of Babel story to explore the parallels.