**Reflections - 8-14 June – Unity in diversity**

**Bible study on Acts 2.1-21**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Father God, we thank you for sending your Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
Fill our hearts with your love and help us to seek your face.
Give us grace to turn to your world with a burning desire to bring your love to others.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Acts 2: 1-21

 The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

**2**When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2**Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3**They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4**All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26954a)] as the Spirit enabled them.

**5**Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6**When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7**Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? **8**Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9**Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26959b)] **10**Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11**(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” **12**Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

**13**Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

### Peter Addresses the Crowd

**14**Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15**These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! **16**No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

**17**“‘In the last days, God says,
    I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
    your young men will see visions,
    your old men will dream dreams.
**18**Even on my servants, both men and women,
    I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
    and they will prophesy.
**19**I will show wonders in the heavens above
    and signs on the earth below,
    blood and fire and billows of smoke.
**20**The sun will be turned to darkness
    and the moon to blood
    before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
**21**And everyone who calls
    on the name of the Lord will be saved.’[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26971c)]

 **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**

The disciples are together, praying, and God comes and blows them away, turns them inside out and fills them with life! But this is not just a private experience: it draws a crowd. From day one, the Church existed for others and not just itself; from day one, the Church faced outwards into the world not inwards into itself.

The Holy Spirit didn’t just anoint the leaders but filled each and everyone in the room (there were 120 or so there). And the Holy Spirit then pushed the disciples out of their comfort zone into the world to speak to any and everyone in languages they understood. What began upstairs behind locked doors spilled out into the streets of the crowded city. And the ensuing rumpus ended with a baptismal service.

Note that the list of countries in 2:5-11 is a picture of the Holy Spirit bringing down the barriers that divide people. This is in many ways the reversing of the story of Babel in the Genesis passage – the scattering of that story is replaced by a gathering here: all people, all languages, all hearing what God is doing. But all these people, in Jerusalem for the festival, will be scattered back to the communities from which they came.

These crowds report hearing the good news in their own language. Often, we think of the miracle of Pentecost as the gift of tongues, so the disciples could speak about what God is doing. But maybe it is more about hearing. The miracle is that everyone heard this good news in their own language, in a way that they could understand and respond to. As Peter unpacks what has happened, he talks about the end of the world. It starts with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on everyone and endswith signs in the heavens. What Peter is seeing here is the end of the scattering of Babel, the end of that world of division and antagonism, and the start of the new world where a diverse body of people is gathered by the gospel of Jesus and the power of his Spirit. The only suitable language is the apocalyptic vocabulary of the prophet Joel, quoted in verses 17-21.

 **Reflection**

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

It is difficult to describe something as abstract as the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Many different images are used in Scripture including fire, water, and a rushing wind. All of these ideas imply energy and movement. The image of the fire is both communal and individual. All were filled with the Spirit, yet a tongue fell on each separately. God, through the Holy Spirit, recognises us as individuals with our own gifts, passions and personality traits. Together, though, we are more than the sum of our separate identities. Do we recognise gifts in each other and bring them together to present something beautiful to God?



**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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* How does this image express something of the spirit of Pentecost?
* What’s your favourite image of the Holy Spirit – fire, water, a rushing wind?
* How does your church nurture and celebrate difference and diversity?

**Prayer**

Today we have heard miraculous stories of people both separated and united by language. Lord, we thank you for our mother tongue, the language that reveals our true selves. We rejoice in the gift of communication.
Thank you that our words can be extraordinary when your Spirit breathes through them.
**Amen.**