

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Acts 2:1-21

^{2:1} 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? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴ But 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. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ 'In 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. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

Commentary

The Pentecost event fulfilled earlier promises made by John the Baptist and Jesus. The Greek word Pentecost means "fiftieth." Our Christian celebration of Pentecost is rooted in this ancient Jewish Festival of Weeks, which celebrates fifty days after Passover. It is an agricultural

celebration giving God thanks for the “first fruits” of the harvest. As the rush of wind filled the house where they were meeting, Peter addressed the Jewish crowd, explaining that it was God’s Spirit that had endowed them with these awesome new powers. He quoted the prophet Joel, who, centuries earlier had prophesied that God would “pour out my spirit upon all flesh” so that all—sons and daughters, young and old, slave and free, men and women—would prophesy, dream, and see signs, omens, and visions (Joel 2). Peter wanted the Jewish crowd to relate Joel’s words to the rush of wind to the new, vital energy now possessed within them. In Acts, Peter’s speech was the first public Christian witness. The Day of Pentecost in Acts was not the only time recorded in the New Testament where the Spirit appeared. In John 20, Jesus’ followers received the Spirit on Easter night. Also, Luke describes other times when disciples and new believers received the Spirit. Today, we generally believe that the Spirit continues to touch and guide believers and communities of faith.

Reflection

In Acts, Luke emphasized that the work of the Holy Spirit was ongoing in the life of believers. Throughout history, the church has sometimes emphasized the sovereignty of God, sometimes the redemptive work of Christ, and sometimes the power and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Which do you think the church is primarily emphasizing today? Which part of God’s nature is most important to you?

Romans 8:14-17

^{8:14} For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Commentary

After two decades of Paul’s preaching, teaching, and writing, Romans expresses some of his most mature thoughts. Our verses offer God’s solution to the human dilemma posed in Chapter 7: We know God’s law holds out promise of life to us; we want to follow the law; but because we are human, we cannot do the full good that it requires of us. Therefore, a gracious God sets us free to walk, not in the law, but in the Spirit. (Romans 7:14-25) If we are led by the Spirit, we become children of God, not slaves to the law. Through this process, we discover that God yearns for us to become Spirit-led children, exhibiting love and generosity rather than being entrenched in rule and form over grace.

Reflection

Paul contrasts being “Spirit-led” (which brings life and vitality) with being “law-bound” (which brings death and rigidity). What corresponds to being “law-bound” in our experience? What do we need to change—as individuals and congregations—to become more open to being increasingly “Spirit-led”?

John 14:8-17, (25-27)

^{14:8} Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. ¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Commentary

The Greek word *paraclete* means literally “called to the side of.” It refers to the Holy Spirit and is variously translated as “counselor,” “comforter,” and “advocate,” highlighting that the Spirit has several functions. Unlike Paul, however, John does not connect the Spirit with baptism or spiritual gifts. John asserts that, after Jesus is gone, the Spirit continued God’s presence in the world so that succeeding generations could know God (14:12-15). The presence and work of the Spirit has at least two functions: to remind us about Jesus’ teachings, and to guide us toward deeper truth about God. Just as the disciple’s ideas changed about Jesus after His death, so do we continue to grow in the faith—thanks to the work of God’s Spirit.

Reflection

The Spirit guides our growth in faith. How have your beliefs changed through the years? Have you sensed the Spirit’s guidance in this? How do you discern it?

^{104:24} O LORD, how manifold are your works!
 **In wisdom you have made them all;
 the earth is full of your creatures.**

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
 **creeping things innumerable are there,
 living things both small and great.**

²⁶ There go the ships,
 and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷ **These all look to you
 to give them their food in due season;**

²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
 **when you take away their breath, they die
 and return to their dust.**

³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
 and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
 may the LORD rejoice in his works—

³² **who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke.**

³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the LORD.

^{35b} Bless the LORD, O my soul.
 Praise the LORD!

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.