

Parishes of St Philips and All Saints Kew with St Luke's Kew
Where all God's Children are Welcome

Bible Study for the ninth week of the Covid 19 church building closure

Section 1: Acts 2: 1-21

Prayer: Open our hearts, Loving God, to the wonders of your word. May we embrace its teachings and rejoice in all its richness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Read the passage through twice:

When the day of Pentecost came, the disciples were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia ¹⁰Phrygia 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!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." ¹⁴Then 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. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, 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.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

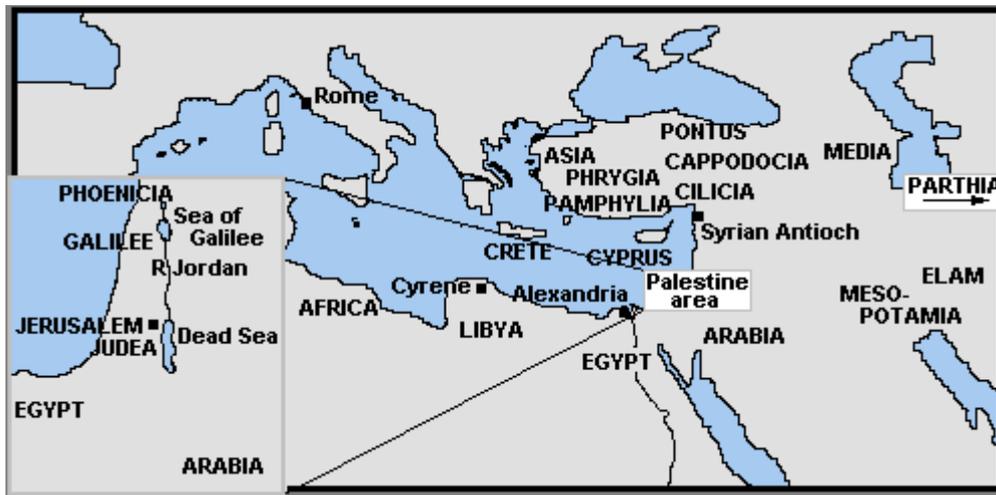
²¹And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Background

Luke paints a dynamic picture of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, but it is couched in very impressionistic language. What actually happened that morning in Jerusalem remains enigmatic, but its effect is still being felt to this day.

Some questions

- The scene is set – a room, with all the disciples together. Of which other events does this remind you?
- Note how Luke prefaces the sound of the wind – “like a ...” and then the tongues of fire – “what seemed to be” – why is Luke so vague?
- Why did they start to speak in different languages?
- Is this a one-off event, or does it reverse an event in the Old Testament? How might Luke be driving this story? Where is he heading with his depiction of the work of the Holy Spirit (Think Babel).
- How would you react if you were in a room where this happened? What would you feel? How positive an experience would this be, or would it be frightening?
- They were obviously making a lot of noise – houses in Jerusalem did not have windows as such, but large flaps that swung up and out to provide light and air to the room. Anyone in the street below would have heard everything that was going on in the room. What sort of impression did people outside the house get?



- This map provides all the locations from which the different people in the crowd originated from. It is just about everywhere in the Roman Empire at the time, apart from Gaul & Hispania, but that is probably because the Jewish Diaspora took a certain amount of time to reach the newer areas that had been conquered.
- All these people had one common language, if not two (Hebrew and Greek), but the Holy Spirit speaks to them in their “own” language – the language in which they are the most comfortable. Why?
- Why accuse the disciples of drunkenness?
- “What does this mean” the crowd may well ask – so what does it mean?
- Peter gets up to speak. Why him?
- This is not the whole sermon – it continues for a further 15 verses. Peter goes on to talk about Jesus in terms of Old Testament prophecy, just as he places the action of the Holy Spirit in him and the other disciples in that context. How helpful are his words?
- Why choose this passage from Joel – a particularly apocalyptic text?
- The release of the Holy Spirit into the world was an expected part of the advent of the Messiah. Up until this point, it was believed that the Holy Spirit came and went from an individual, according to the needs of the moment. Some gained special strength, others specific words to deliver, but like Amos the shepherd-prophet, each would then return to their day job. This is different – the Holy Spirit will now stay with the disciples and all believers for the whole of their lives. What has brought about this change?
- Peter was addressing a Jewish audience, made up of religious people who had travelled long distances to worship God in Jerusalem. In that sense, it was a captive, expectant audience. He therefore tailors his message to his hearers. Is his sermon effective for us today?

Read the passage through again, out loud if possible

Review

What has this passage taught you about

- God?
- Jesus Christ?
- The Church?
- Our current situation?

Prayer: Loving God, you live in us day by day through your Holy Spirit. Open our hearts to the power of your love, to the effectiveness of your grace and to the boundless energy that your Spirit alone can bring. Amen.