

*Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary*  
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for May 20, 2018  
Pentecost Sunday



### THE READINGS

**First Reading: Acts 2:1-21** *Alternative Ezekiel 37:1-14*

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

*Worth Noting: The enumeration of home countries of Jews visiting Jerusalem, from Iran to Libya, captures the geographic scope of the task to which the disciples were called and the eventual breadth of the Christian community. Does your religious community reflect the kind of diversity in this first congregation?*

**Psalm 104:24-34, 35b**

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!

*Worth Noting: The psalmist is overwhelmed with creation's order and abundance, reflecting God's wisdom, creativity, and boundless love. God created the great sea monster Leviathan, feared by the agrarian Hebrews, to sport and frolic on the deep. Today many religious communities engage natural*

*creation in their community gardens and stewardship of material resources. How does your community do this?*

**Second Reading: Romans 8:22-27** *Alternative Acts 2:1-21*

<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

*Worth Noting: Paul the mystic. While the Roman poets may have seen creation rejoicing at the rule of the Emperors, Paul the mystic hears all creation, itself suffused with the Spirit, groaning to birth the Reign of God. How does modern culture view creation: an unmitigated good? fragile? resources to be exploited? How does your community view creation?*

**Gospel: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

[Jesus said to his disciples] <sup>26</sup> “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup> You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. . . .

<sup>4b</sup> “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup> But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

<sup>12</sup> “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

*Worth Noting: Jesus teaches that his physical presence is of less value than the indwelling of the Spirit. How does that work? What would it be like if Jesus were here but not the Spirit? Would we need the fruits of the Spirit?*

## CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

### Entering into the Scriptures

Pentecost, the Christian celebration of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit among the first disciples, occurs 50 days after the Resurrection of Jesus and usually roughly coincides

with the Jewish festival of Shavuot (this year sunset to sunset May 19 to 21). Shavuot, “weeks” in English, probably originated as an agricultural celebration dedicating the first fruits of the spring grain harvest (see Leviticus 23:15-21) before acquiring a religious significance celebrating the giving of the Torah to the Hebrew people on Mt. Sinai. It is celebrated seven weeks (a week of weeks) after Passover and is the Pentecost (fifty days) in Acts 2:1 above. The ancient sages noted particularly that the feast celebrates the giving of the Torah, not its reception, since each day the faithful are to receive the Torah and live into its covenantal relationships.

For Christians, the two feasts have certain similarities. Jews celebrate first the liberation from slavery and then the giving of the Torah. Christians celebrate the liberation from death to eternal life and the bestowal of the Spirit. As is said of the gift of the Torah, so Christians may mark the gift of the Spirit which then must be received each day. Christians logically must see the gift of the Spirit fulfilling the promise and purpose of the gift of the Torah, in bringing the Good News to all nations.

### **Spring’s New Life**

Springtime provides nature’s setting for beginnings. Jews celebrate Shavuot as the beginning of the Jewish religion in the gift of Torah at Mt Sinai just as Christians celebrate Pentecost as the beginning of the Church with the gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus’ disciples. In their ways, both Shavuot and Pentecost celebrate God’s abundant generosity and the response of God’s people in accepting a new way of life. From Sinai, the Hebrew people formed a nation worshipping and glorifying the LORD. From Pentecost, disciples see the world as the site for proclaiming, in word and deed, the Good News that Jesus reconciled the world to God. At Shavuot and Pentecost, some Jews and Christians celebrate a rite of confirmation for teenagers, marking their accession to the duties and privileges of adults and the renewal of the community.

In an increasingly urbanized world, however, it can be difficult to see the links between the Church’s liturgical year and the cycle of the seasons. One symbol of Pentecost brings the two together: the strawberry. Its color reminds us of the fire of the Spirit. Its shape reminds us of the tongues of fire and the human heart the fire touches. Strawberries bring the flavors of spring, hint at the warmth of summer, and in shape and color remind Christians of the gift of the Holy Spirit.



### **Questions for Discussion**

Each year, communities of Christians, Jews, and Muslims celebrate Passover together. Could they also celebrate Shavuot? What might it look like? (Some Jews stay up all night reading and studying Torah. Ready to pull an all-night Bible Study?)

Creation themes are prominent in these readings. What do you think: can creation – the natural, non-human world – groan? Is Paul simply using metaphorical, poetic

language to express what is really a deep, human longing for redemption?

Isaiah 11:1-3 enumerates the traditional seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Were Jesus to be physically present still, these gifts, at least in their fullness, presumably would not have been given to the Church. Which would be most missed today? Which seems in shortest supply?



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