

Study 2

Empowered



Key verse

'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them' (Acts 2:4)

Opening discussion

Can you recall your first experience of church?

The gift received

(Read Acts 2:1-13)

Pentecost or 'The Feast of Weeks' celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jews from a wide area would be in Jerusalem for the Feast and, with the city buzzing with Jews and Gentile converts, the promised Holy Spirit empowers the apostles and so obviously grabs the attention of the crowds who had gathered there.

If we consider the coming of Jesus into the world (the incarnation) and his earthly ministry as God intervening in human history for the salvation of humankind, then the coming of the Holy Spirit must also be included in that series of divine happenings. It became a sign that God wanted to be known throughout the world and must have been a remarkable story to take back to areas as diverse as northern Africa, Persia and Rome. But there were also doubters in the crowd, convinced that these men were drunk!

Discussion

- 1 This was a time of pilgrimage, still an important part of some faiths, including Christian communities. What might such a commitment bring by way of blessing?
- 2 Is the cynicism shown by those thinking the apostles were merely drunk understandable, and how would you react if you were in that crowd?

SAMPLE

Peter emboldened

(Read Acts 2:14-41)

The Jews had always been a small nation but held on to the conviction that they were God's chosen people. They knew that humanly they were not as strong as the surrounding nations and their history witnessed to this truth, so they concluded that God would at some point intervene and put things right. It was to be 'The Day of the Lord', which fitted time-wise between 'The Present Age' and 'The Age to Come'.

This is what Peter is saying to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem, that for generations they have looked forward to God breaking through and now, in Jesus, that great Day has come. It was Peter's privilege to preach what is generally considered to be the first Christian sermon!

This type of preaching was called 'kerygma' or a 'herald's message', the plain truth spelled out. Here, Paul emphasises the guilt of those who crucified their Messiah, the reversal of their verdict in the resurrection of Jesus, the evidence of Christ's well-known ministry of grace and power, the possibility of blessing and the gift of the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith.

The effectiveness of the sermon can be gauged by the number who responded, around three thousand people we are told.

Discussion

- 3 Do you consider the prophesy of Joel to be for one time and place or applying to all Christians?
- 4 Peter tells his audience that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all who believe. How do you perceive the Spirit working through your faith and life?
- 5 Peter describes the generation he was living in as 'corrupt' (V 40). How would you describe the current generation?

SAMPLE

The pattern of the early church

(Read Acts 2: 42-47)

So, in this passage we get a snapshot of how the fledgling Church of Christ operated day to day. Firstly, it was a learning church, and the apostles' duties were immediately twofold - to witness to the world but also to teach the new Christian family who were hungry for knowledge about Jesus. This was the teaching that would give rise to the written material we have in the Gospels and Letters in our Bibles.

It was a church of fellowship. The word used in Greek is 'koinōnia', pronounced 'koi-no-nia'. Paul in his first letter to Corinthians writes, 'God is faithful, who has called you into

fellowship (koinōnia) with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord', and this has been called the essence of Christianity, namely fellowship with Christ, leading to a fellowship with the Father and with one another in Christ. It was a community committed to sharing, to being family, and making sure no one was in need.

It was a praying and worshipping church. They continued to meet daily in the temple courts and share a common meal as they broke bread together in a spirit of gratitude and reverence.

It was also a happy Church, which attracted others and swelled their numbers. As an early

model of Church it was very successful, but in the longer term we know that administrative problems arose and it became chronically poor, needing Paul's assistance to raise much-needed funds (Acts 6:1, 1 Cor 16:1-4).

Discussion

- 6 Do you find Luke's description of the fledgling Church attractive or challenging?
- 7 What do you think of the overall balance of activities in the Church that Luke describes?
- 8 Are there any ideas here that are worthy of consideration in your own church?

Quotes

'I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else.' (Pope Francis)

'All my momma's people were very musical. My grandpa, who was the Pentecostal minister, he was a great musician. He played the fiddle, he played the piano.' (Dolly Parton)

'I was raised in the Methodist Church, which is a very Germanic, military kind of music they have there. I heard this other music on the radio: Pentecostal. That was right up my street.' (Leon Russell)

SAMPLE

Persecution begins

(Read Acts 4:1-10, 5:12-21, 6:8-15)

In Acts 3 Peter and John were going to the temple for prayer. They were in the busy Court of the Gentiles where the money-changers and sellers of sacrificial offerings had stalls, and the area would be crowded with both worshippers and sightseers.

It is here that they bring healing to a man crippled from birth. 'Silver or gold I do not have,' says Peter. 'But what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!' (Acts 3:6)

The crippled man gets up and jumps up and down, praising God. The effect on the crowd is one of astonishment and they rush across to see what has happened. Peter turns the incident into a suitable moment to preach again and the authorities are not happy.



The Sadducees were a party whose best interests were served by keeping on good terms with the Romans. As such, they were very hot on public disorder, which this was deemed to be. They also did not believe in resurrection from the dead, the message that Peter and John were proclaiming. Hence the arrest and an appearance before the Sanhedrin and another preaching opportunity for Peter!

Later in chapter 5 we find the Church meeting in Solomon's Colonnade, one of two great colonnades surrounding the Temple area. It's worth noting that attendance at the Temple was important for the believers as they sought to grow in faith and bring that faith into their

daily lives. They were also keen to be open in their act of worship so that others might see and be drawn into the fellowship. Again, there is evidence of the promised Holy Spirit working through the apostles, and the inevitable response of the high priest and Sadducees. We also see God unlocking the prison doors, so the apostles can walk free!

The story of Stephen, though both heroic and tragic, is also notable because of the presence of Saul, who seems to have approved of Stephen's violent death.

Discussion

- 9 Was it inevitable that the early Church would face such opposition and persecution from the religious leaders of the Jews, and should they not have tried to avoid confrontation?

- 10 Why might the Church suffer persecution in some countries today and not in others?

Thought for Prayer

Pray for Christians throughout the world who are suffering persecution for their faith, that God would sustain them through their troubles.

'Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.' (Acts 2:38)

'Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46,47)

SAMPLE