

## EASTER 2019, PART II: LOVING

### SERIES OVERVIEW

Easter is more than just a day. It is a 50-day season that marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ways we live into that reality, just as Jesus' disciples did. The season of Easter has long been a time when newcomers to Christianity and those already on the Christian journey revisit the foundations of the faith. In other words, this is a time when people examine basic doctrines, providing, as Laurence Hull Stookey writes, "a time for both discovery and reconsideration." [1] As a result, our resources will culminate in two four-week series—"Living" and "Loving"—that will focus upon the gospel narratives and ways to integrate these doctrinal pieces into daily Christian living.

This second series focuses upon the action of God upon those who believe *in* and *into* Jesus and the action stirred among those who believe, thus creating a flow of divine energy from God to the church to the world. All the themes for this series could be subtitled, "by a Loving God"—marked by a loving God, sent by a loving God, and so on. In the first week, Jesus offers a new commandment to love one another and *be known* as Jesus' disciples. This "marking" is the way we are known and has direct connections with our baptism into Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The second week presents a Trinitarian model in which Jesus and the Spirit are sent by God the Father in a self-giving action. The love that comes from God extends from God to the world. Notice in the Scripture for week three that Jesus says, "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). This is Jesus' indication that his presence will continue as the body of Christ in the world, and those who join in the body of Christ will know the love given from God. On the Day of Pentecost, the church is born to empower people to go forth and proclaim the love of God throughout the world, in languages far and wide.

Loving, then, becomes the natural response and embodiment of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. *We live* into the reality that Jesus is alive, and we *love* as a result of it.

**Week 1: Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**May 19**

**Marked**

[John 13:31-35](#)

**Week 2: Sixth Sunday of Easter**

**May 26**

**Sent**

[John 14:23-29](#)

**Week 3: Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**June 2**

**Embodied**

[John 17:20-26](#)

**Week 4: Day of Pentecost**

**June 9**

**Empowered**

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

\*All scripture quotations are NRSV.

Loving  
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: Marked  
Fifth Sunday after Easter, Year C  
May 19, 2019

**PLANNING NOTES**  
**Reading Notes**

See full texts, artwork, and *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* for this Sunday at [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectonnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

**Calendar Notes**

May

- All Month [Christian Home Month](#)
- All Month [Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#)
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- June 19 [Juneteenth](#)

July

- July 4 [Independence Day \(USA\)](#)

August

All Month [Back to School](#)

August 6 [Hiroshima/Nagasaki Memorial](#)

## Planning for This Series

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We here at Discipleship Ministries Worship Resources would love to hear stories from your *seasons of suddenlies*. Contact us at [csmolka@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:csmolka@umcdiscipleship.org).

## Abbreviations

UMH=*United Methodist Hymnal*

SOZ=*Songs of Zion*

## **BOW=Book of Worship**

### **WEEK 1 - John 13: 31-35                      The New Commandment**

<sup>31</sup> When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God has been glorified in him,<sup>[a]</sup> God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ <sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**Music Resources**            UMH 104, 206, 384, 393, 432, 560, 608, 861            SOZ 76

**Prayer Resources**        BOW 436, 501-506, 511, 514  
   UMH 493., 607

## **PREACHING NOTES**

### ***Marked by a Loving God***

#### **John 13:31-35**

Key words/phrases: Gone out, look, know, love

This passage begins a collection of passages known as the Farewell Discourse. Jesus is preparing the disciples for a life without his physical presence. More than offering comfort, Jesus is trying to reorient them toward their mission. The community is still at a vulnerable state in its life together. If the community doesn't learn to inhabit a love that will thrive despite its differences, the message of God in the broader community will be affected.

“When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him” (vs. 31).

This section begins with the betrayal by Judas Iscariot; this can't be forgotten, as Judas is the subject of the first part of verse 31 (“when he had gone out”). Here we also have

the language of immediacy, in Markan style, drawing the line of actions clearly. The betrayal of Judas initiates the process of Jesus being glorified. Dictionary.com defines *glorified* as “to be represented in such a way to appear more elevated or special.”

“If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’” (verses 32-33).

In the moment following his betrayal, Jesus is in the process of becoming glorified—representing something more than he already has—which is so astounding that Jesus has to reassure the disciples yet again without making them feel as though they will be abandoned. The disciples have not yet fully understood the glorification of Jesus, which is linked to what must be done on the cross. They have not fully understood that Jesus is beyond *special*; that Jesus is their source of abundance in times of uncertainty.

Perhaps you have had a time in your life when you were waiting for bad news, or what felt like an ending that you didn’t want to accept. I can imagine the disciples in the moment before Jesus spoke these words, getting a lump in their throats, trying to swallow down their fear: “*Little children, I am with you only a little longer . . . where I am going, you cannot come.*” Laura A. Young describes it succinctly as “intimate and off-putting.” [1]

“You will look for me” (v. 33) acknowledges the longing the disciples will feel after his departure – the beginnings of a deep nostalgia for the assurance that comes from the intimacy of physical presence, of hours journeying together, weary with exhaustion, sharing inside jokes along the way.

Perhaps one responsibility of discipleship is to always keep looking for the image of God in others; for ways to show that we have been marked by love; for ways to see the sacred in others that go beyond “the spark of the divine” and instead affirm their distinctiveness as those children whom Jesus loved enough to give them a new way of being with one another: the love made possible by Jesus’ own presence as a human, and Jesus’ own suffering at the hands of empire.

On our more honest days, we admit that there are some in our own communities whom it is hard to love. Our proximity to others with whom we disagree creates complexity in how we relate to one another. The power dynamics in our own relationships cannot be avoided. There are some in our church who feel betrayed by their siblings in the church.

There are yet others who would be the first to announce that they would never cause such harm to the work of God.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Verses 34-35).

The commandment to love could be easily dismissed, were it not so context specific. In *Feasting on the Gospels*, John Yieh explains that the commandment to love was "necessary for a minority group under stress . . . if they cannot love their own brothers and sisters, how can they love their enemies?" [2] It is because we are marked by love that we are brought to the same table, and it's because we are marked by love that we leave the table.

#### Questions for Reflection:

- Imagine the one person in your church community or workplace with whom you struggle. What would it look like to give this person "elbow room" at the table of God?
- Name one way you have been "marked" to show love in your community.
- When was the last time you looked for God in an unexpected place?

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[1] Laura A Young. Ed. Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson. *Feasting on the Gospels*. John, Volume 2: Chapters 10-21. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015). 130.

[2] John Yieh. *Feasting*, 133.

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## GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

### Articles and Resources

- [21st Century Worship Resources for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C](#)
- [Easter Series 2016: A Focus on Our Baptismal Vows and the Book of Acts](#)
- [THE GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR EASTER DAY OR SEASON](#)

### Seasonal/Secular

- [Older Adult Recognition Day Resources](#)
- [Asian/Pacific-American Heritage Month Resources](#)
- [Christian Home Month Resources](#)

Loving  
**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: Sent**  
**Sixth Sunday after Easter, Year C**  
**May 26, 2019**

**PLANNING NOTES**  
**Reading Notes**

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### WEEK 2 - John 14: 23-29

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup> “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Advocate,<sup>[a]</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is

greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

### **Abbreviations**

**UMH** = *United Methodist Hymnal*

**UR** = *Upper Room Worship Book*

**TFWS** = *The Faith We Sing*

**AWR** = *Africana Worship Series, Year C*

**OLOFOB** = *One Lord, One Faith, One*

**SOZ** = *Songs of Zion*

### **Music Resources**

AWR 225

OLOFOB 93

UMH 104, 206, 384, 393, 408, 432, 560, 608, 861

UR 152, 154, 158, 183, 415

SOZ 1, 9, 19, 26, 36, 42, 59, 61, 182, 70, 71

TFWS 2239

### **Prayer Resources**

BOW 423, 437, 501-506, 511, 514

UMH 493, 607

## **PREACHING NOTES**

### ***Sent by a Loving God***

#### **John 14:23-29**

Key words: Home, Advocate, teach, peace

“Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’” (v. 23).

The intimacy of God is shown here with the idea of Jesus and the person of God “making a home” with the disciples. The theological idea of *making a home* with God doesn’t seem to get as much attention as verse 27. Sammy G. Alfaro describes it as “the spiritual indwelling of the Father and the Son in the life of the believer.” [1] This is more than just a convenient model to be used by Trinitarians; this process of making a home is a communal experience with God, which is “available to those who love and keep God’s His [sic] commandments.” [2]

“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you” (verses 24-25).

A literal reading of verses 23-24 might imply that those who do not keep God’s words are therefore not loved by God. Yet the focus here for John is consistent with his message throughout the gospel: *love necessitates action*. Love enables us to be sent into the world. Jesus is using some of his precious remaining time to be explicit about what he hopes for them.

“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” (v. 26).

The Holy Spirit here serves a greater function than simply to remind us. As one of my seminary professors once quipped, “God is not your Blackberry!” The Holy Spirit serves as a teacher to the disciples. But lest the disciples think it is just about their comfort, the Holy Spirit helps the disciples truly understand and live out of that understanding as a blessing to God. [3] However, we do an injustice to those who experience mental illness or limited intellectual capacity if we suggest the primary role of the Spirit is to impart knowledge or true wisdom that must be articulated and fully processed. The grace of God is abundantly present in a multitude of Spirit experiences. The disciples cannot yet perceive the value of the gift they will be given.

“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” (v. 27).

We often hear this read at funerals for those grieving. Perhaps you have read those words many times at yet another funeral for a parishioner, praying for God’s shalom to surround the hearts of those grieving. And yet, I can’t help but wonder: Is Jesus implying that we have a choice about whether our hearts are troubled? That we have a choice about whether we are afraid? *Is that really fair, Jesus?*

As disciples, we are all *sent* into the world to live out the love we have experienced. Embracing the reality that we are all “sent” in some way helps us keep perspective when are tempted to let our hearts be troubled or when we are tempted to give in to fear. There is intentionality in our efforts to keep God’s commandments.

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I” (v. 28).

I wonder if the disciples felt some measure of guilt for their own sadness at losing the physical form of Jesus. How could they not? But Jesus is not trying to manipulate their emotions; rather, he is trying to draw out the parts of them that are able to rejoice despite their confusion or sadness. Jesus is drawing out the truest parts of the disciples, so that they are able to claim the love of God on their lives and willingly be sent into the world.

“And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe” (v. 29).

Again, John is making the connection between Jesus’ words and the admonition to believe. The disciples are being called to look past their own emotions in the moment before Jesus leaves and be reminded of the promises of God.

Questions/prompts for further reflection:

- What does it mean to you to be sent by the Holy Spirit? How do you recognize the Spirit’s promptings?
- What practices do you use to help when your heart is feeling troubled?
- Describe a time when you were able to rejoice in the midst of your sadness. What did you learn from that experience?

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[2] Alfaro, *Feasting*.

[3] Richard Ward. *Feasting*, 167.

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- [“Holy Wisdom”: A Great Thanksgiving](#)

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- [Christian Home Month Resources](#)

### Offertory Prayer

### Graphics Downloads

Loving  
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**Seventh Sunday after Easter, Year C**  
**June 2, 2019**

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### **Week 3 - John 17:20-26**

<sup>20</sup>“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,<sup>[a]</sup> so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

<sup>25</sup>“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

## Abbreviations

**UR** = *Upper Room WorshipBook*

**TWFS** = *The Faith We Sing*

**AWS** = *Africana Worship Series, Year C*

**ZSS** = *Zion Still Sings*

**Music Resources** UR 430, 431, 439

TFWS 2224

ZSS 36, 40, 78, 80, 81, 82, 89, 91, 95, 219

**Prayer, Litanies** AWS 94, 123, 180, 273

## PREACHING NOTES

### ***Embodied by a Loving God***

#### **John 17:20-26**

As we explore the powerful prayer offered by Jesus, I am reminded of a scene from the movie *Places in the Heart*. The setting is a small town in 1930s Texas, in the heart of Ku Klux Klan activity. The town sheriff (Royce) is called to apprehend a young black man (Wylie) who has a weapon. The man is prepared to hand over his weapon, when it accidentally backfires and kills the sheriff. This incident, although accidental, sets off a chain of events that further fuels the racism of the community. Wylie is sought out and killed. The widow of the sheriff (Edna) struggles to make ends meet without her husband. Harm is caused by multiple members of the community: in their relationships, in the assumptions they make about their neighbors, and in the ways they disregard other members of their community. At the end of the movie, we see Communion being passed down the line in the pew. We see Edna and her children and other members of the church. But we also see Wylie reach out and receive the cup, and we see the plate passed to Royce. The lines between the living and the dead – the lines between the harmed, the victim, and the oppressor – are crossed. They are all one in that moment in time.

In chapter 17 in the gospel of John, we have a plea for Jesus' followers to become *one*. It is a poetic prayer that is simultaneously beautiful and repetitive, as we would expect

to find in the Gospel of John. We get a glimpse into Jesus' heart and longing for the believing community, which is another opportunity to try to grasp how Jesus understands unity.

Verses 20-21 are one sentence in the Greek: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Verses 20-21 are the central prayer. In the Greek, verses 22-23 are also one sentence, and they function as the heart of the prayer: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." In this prayer, Jesus recognizes the radical power of believers to bear witness in such a way that those who don't believe are captivated by the message. He recognizes that the witness of the disciples living as those who are *marked* and *sent* will ultimately be fruitful. The world, rather than raging against the disciples, is the recipient of its witness. [1]

"That they may be one" (vs. 21) refers to a unity that moves beyond agreeing on important issues or accepting differences and into a mirroring of "the mutuality and reciprocity of the Father/Son relationship." [2] Here, as elsewhere in the gospels, we are given the model of the Trinity for our own relationships. Unity can be defined not in the specific terms of our own design, but as *mutuality* and *reciprocity*.

The foundation of the relationship of the believing community is based on the relationship of the Triune God, which the disciples glimpse in an intimate moment of Jesus' prayer:

"I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (vs. 23).

The word "complete" is often used in the gospel of John to mean Jesus completing the work of God in the world. [3] In other words, what happens in this prayer is not just a plea for the disciples to get along or work out their problems. Rather, the disciples reclaim their responsibility of continuing in the work of God through the act of reciprocating and living in mutuality, through which others on the outskirts of their community may come to see and know God.

New Testament scholar Gail R. O'Day presents this prayer as an opportunity for the disciples to "overhear" and learn: "Jesus places the church's future in the hands of God and invites the church to listen in on that conversation." [4] Placing our future in the hands of God does not alleviate us of our responsibility to work for a future that reflects God's love and justice in the world. This prayer shows that Jesus subverts any expectations that he would wield his authority in a way that would be contrary to how God the Father/Creator and the Holy Spirit/Advocate would exist in the world.

Jesus embodies mutuality and reciprocity by asking God to be with the disciples in a moment of intimacy, and trusting in his relationship to show such vulnerability as a model of true unity. Jesus is advocating for those whom God has marked by love and sent in love, for the benefit of the larger community. In the difficult and, often, painful work of trying to live together in community, we are called to take the next step and embody the presence of God for those "to whom love is a stranger." [5]

#### Questions for Reflection:

- In *Feasting on the Gospels*, Thomas Edward Breidenthal offers that "Unity is a relationship of mutual dependence and trust, such that our primary access to God is by way of one another . . . it is our capacity for community that is the glory God has given us." [6] Describe a time when you have seen God through a member of your community in an unexpected or surprising way.
- How have you experienced God embodied in your faith journey?

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[1] *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Volume IX. John. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995). 794.

[2] *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 795.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Gail R. O'Day. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 797.

[5] "A Service of Christian Marriage I," *United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1997), 869.

[6] Thomas Edward Breidenthal. Ed. Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson. *Feasting on the Gospels*. John, Volume 2: Chapters 10-21. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 238.

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## **GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES**

### Articles and Resources

- [Christ Is Raised, a Living Witness](#)
- [21st Century Africana Worship Resources for Ascension Day \(Or Ascension Sunday\)](#)
- [Prayers for Ascension Day \(Or Ascension Sunday\)](#)
- [Watching and Waiting: Meditation for Ascension Day](#)
- [Ride on King Jesus: A Gathering Litany for Ascension Day](#)
- [Disturb the City: 21st Century Worship Resources for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C](#)
- [Easter Series 2016: A Focus on Our Baptismal Vows and the Book of Acts](#)

### Seasonal/Secular

- [Father's Day - June 16](#)

### Offertory Prayer

### Graphics Downloads

Loving  
**PENTECOST: Empowered**  
**Pentecost, Year C**  
**June 9, 2019**

**PLANNING NOTES**  
**Reading Notes**

See full texts, artwork, and *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* for this Sunday at [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

**Calendar Notes**

June

June

**June 2**      [Ascension of the Lord Sunday](#)

**June 9**      [Pentecost](#)

**June 16**     [Trinity Sunday](#)

**June 16**     [Peace with Justice Sunday](#)

**June 16**     [Father's Day](#)

**June 19**     [Juneteenth](#)

July

**July 4**      [Independence Day \(USA\)](#)

August

**All Month**   [Back to School](#)

**August 6**    [Hiroshima/Nagasaki Memorial](#)

**Planning for This Series**

In this series, we are moving into a *season of suddenlies*: Jesus announces his imminent departure back to heaven; the Holy Spirit makes her dramatic, fiery arrival on earth. *Earth, Wind, and Fire!* As Jesus prepares to take his leave, his benedictory address focuses on themes of glorification, departure, and most of all, love—the primary symbol of discipleship. Jesus emphasizes the importance of lineal relationships: disciples to Jesus, to the world, the Creator,

and the vital mediating power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In the spirit and ethos of the Passover Meal, Jesus and the disciples are huddled together at table in family style. We hear Jesus address his followers as *little children*, and he proceeds to teach them as such.

As you plan this series, give attention to the lessons and learnings, teaching and tooling from the Upper Room. Look for ways to emulate this powerful Pentecostal experience both within and beyond your faith community. Begin to intentionally identify ways to strengthen and celebrate the spirit of *koinonia*, Ubuntu, the Beloved Community outside the comfort of your church building. While our denomination continues to wrestle with the question “Who’s In and Who’s Out?”, how will your local church community respond?

Each week, you will find suggestions for music, prayers, calls to worship, litanies from United Methodist resources that might help bring these biblical passages to life within your particular community. You are encouraged to sing, pray, embody, teach, love, and glorify God through the various texts and tunes provided. Our hope is that you will reenact the Acts 2 passage each week by introducing liturgical symbols and sounds unfamiliar to your congregations. If you choose to introduce a hymn or worship song from another cultural tradition, consider inviting someone from that tradition to participate, making the experience even more authentic for the worshippers. But please do not stop there! Perhaps there could be a reciprocal exchange where your congregation visits with another worshipping community.

We here at Discipleship Ministries Worship Resources would love to hear stories from your *seasons of suddenlies*. Contact us at [csmolka@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:csmolka@umcdiscipleship.org).

#### **WEEK 4 – Acts 2:1-21 The Coming of the Holy Spirit**

**2** 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.

<sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

## **Abbreviations**

**UMH** = *The United Methodist Hymnal*

**UR** = *Upper Room WorshipBook*

**TWFS** = *The Faith We Sing*

**ZSS** = *Zion Still Sings*

**BOW** = *The United Methodist Book of Worship*

## **Music Resources**

UMH 356, 497, 537, 539, 543, 547, 548

UR 96, 167, 444, 447, 449

TFWS 2036, 2047, 2166, 2222, 2232, 2274

ZSS 127, 148, 169, 174, 175, 208, 214, 217, 218, 219

## **Prayer Resources**

BOW 487- 493, 495, 514, 520, 529, 501-506

## PREACHING NOTES

### *Empowered by a Loving God*

#### **Acts 2:1-21**

**Key words:** Rush, entire, filled, amazed

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (v. 1).

Here we move from the promise of the Spirit as Advocate and Comforter, made by John in the Farewell Discourse, to a powerful birth of a Spirit-filled community that is empowered to live its mission in the world. Those who are preaching know very well the wide spectrum of beliefs held by their parishioners about the Holy Spirit. For many congregations, Pentecost is a deeply meaningful time to incorporate rituals throughout the service: some with the celebration of new confirmands, some with a parade of languages, and some who intentionally have readers in many languages. While many of these rituals and traditions are well-loved or enjoyed by parishioners, at some level, those who experience Pentecost each year must move past the fantastical or performative elements associated with the story and embrace the heart of the Spirit’s work in the community.

Reading the passage again, it can still be easy to be struck by the convenience of the entire community being together in one place. The stage has been set for a compelling story from the outset. More than a narrative device, Luke reminds us that Pentecost was already an existing “pilgrimage feast” occurring 50 days following Passover. [1]

“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” (v. 2).

Luke evokes images and descriptions used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the scene, consistent with how God has revealed God's self historically. Fire was a familiar metaphor used to describe the "physiological experience of prophetic inspiration." [2] Note that the sound and wind didn't fill just part of the house. Love fills the entirety of the house!

"Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them" (v. 3).

The gift of the Spirit was not given as one blazing flame hanging over the whole community. Each person in the community experienced a "tongue" of flame. In contrast to the chaotic nature of the sound in verse 2, here the tongue is "resting," as though it were claiming each person in the community.

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (v. 4).

As powerful as this imagery is and continues to be as it inspires and challenges us each Pentecost, we might wonder why we have only four verses. Robert W. Wall suggests that Luke's intention is to bring the focus to the Spirit's effect on the community's mission. [3]

"And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each" (v. 6).

There is no indication before this verse that there was a crowd; presumably, it was another ordinary day until the sound of the languages filled the air. The setting unfolds in a clear progression, in contrast to the chaos of the wind and visuals: first, we imagine the gathering. We find out the gathering is at a house. Suddenly, we learn that a crowd has formed.

“Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”  
(v. 7)

Wall suggests the slightest hint of judgment and surprise here: Galileans were not known for their linguistic ability. [4] We are reminded of a similar sentiment about Jesus’ hometown: “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” The gift of the Spirit – the gift of understanding and interpretation – is also coming to those from an unlikely place. They are not excluded.

“And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” (v. 8)

Here we see yet another example of God empowering those with a specific context. God is using real people to do God’s work.

“Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes . . .” (v. 9-10).

In the long and specific list of people in the area, notice that Luke even includes the visitors to the region. In the giving of the Spirit, the boundaries between resident and visitor are broken. The gift of the Spirit does not discriminate.

“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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning’”  
(v. 14-15).

This introduces a pattern in the book of Acts of frequent misunderstanding. In many instances throughout the narrative, various characters have to stop to explain the meaning behind events as they are unfolding.

“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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Verses 17-21).

Peter returns to the symbolic imagery of Joel 3:1-5 in a new way: not to proclaim judgment, but as a way of continuing in God's “grand reversal” in valuing the entire community, regardless of social or economic status. On the day of Pentecost, God's Spirit was shared in a way that led to those outside the community understanding God in a new way, but also in the specific, contextual languages with which they were most familiar. The power of the clarity given to those who were gathered together was spread among them all, rather than imparted to a select few to enhance their community at the expense of those who had not experienced the love of God.

Wall poignantly summarizes the prophetic action of Pentecost: “The community's forward movement toward God's eschatological horizon of a restored Israel is fundamentally a prophetic movement, a movement of empowered and illumined proclamation; and Pentecost is fundamentally the pouring out of the Spirit of prophecy as the distinguishing mark of that movement.” [5]

On the day of Pentecost, the church is called to continue in the prophetic call of love and justice in the community as those who are empowered by a loving God. As we hear and tell the story again this year, we, too, are asked to speak in our own languages – and perhaps some we are learning to develop – about the radical, inclusive love of God.

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[1] Wall, Robert W. *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume X. Acts.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 53.

[2] Wall, 54.

[3] Wall, 53.

[4] Wall, 55.

[5] Wall, 64.

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## **GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES**

### Articles and Resources

- [Let the Fire of the Holy Spirit Rest on Us](#)
- [They Were Waiting for a Sign from God: 21st Century Worship Resources for the Day of Pentecost](#)
- [Holy Spirit, Rain Down on This Place: 21st Century Resource for the Day of Pentecost](#)
- [Pentecost Fire](#)
- [A Call to Worship for Pentecost Sunday](#)
- [2017 Family Devotions and Observance of Pentecost](#)
- [Spirit of God, Assist and Guide Today](#)
- [THE GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR THE DAY OF PENTECOST](#)
- [Pentecost Commissioning of Laypersons for Ministry in Christ's Name](#)
- [Fire Burning Within! A 21st Century Resource for Pentecost Sunday](#)
- [Worship Anthems and Songs for Pentecost and Beyond: A Six-Pack for Worship](#)
- [What's This Fire](#)
- [Pentecostal Power](#)

### Seasonal/Secular

- [Father's Day, June 16](#)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads