

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Feast of Pentecost (A)

Acts 2.1-21

Psalm 104.25-37

1 Corinthians 12.3b-13

John 20.19-23

**Acts 2.1-21**

1. Luke relates a dramatic scene of the bestowal of the Spirit on the worshipping community.
  - a. At face value, this account conflicts with that of the bestowal of the Spirit at John 20.22.
    - i. However, Luke here relates how the Spirit is given to those outside of the original circle of disciples.
  - b. The scene is framed by the setting of Pentecost, a high festival at which Jews from all the world are in Jerusalem.
    - i. This is reinforced by the fact that the “tongues” reported are *not* unintelligible, ecstatic speech (*glossolalia*) requiring interpretation (*cf.* 1 Cor. 14.23), but intelligible speech spoken in foreign languages (*xenolalia*) of all the known world.
2. The scene is of a new “Israel”.
  - a. The reference to the “day” (v. 1)(in Greek, the reference is to the *fulfillment* of the day) thus sets the scene.
    - i. A period of waiting is now ended.
    - ii. Pentecost in Judaism (the “fiftieth day” from the Passover) was the celebration of the gift of the promised land.
    - iii. The “promised land” now becomes the Church, which separates itself from the unbelieving.
    - iv. The Spirit is the principal mover in the event which opens the Church to the uncircumcised.
3. The content of the ecstatic speech at Pentecost (“of God’s deeds of power,” v. 11) is the same as that spoken by the Gentile converts in Cornelius’ household at Acts 10.46.
  - a. Those informed by the Spirit testify to the salvation offered by God in Jesus.

**Psalm 104.25-37**

1. This selection is taken from a hymn of praise to God, for His creation of the world.
  - a. In this section, the psalmist describes how the LORD maintains His providential creation, and what happens when He does not do so (v.30).
  - b. The imagery is agricultural:
    - i. The Spirit (God’s breath) comes as the Western wind bringing rain.
    - ii. Failure of this leaves the East wind, which leaves the land dry.
    - iii. The people thus “return to their dust” at the failure of the crop.

**1 Corinthians 12.3b-13**

1. In this section Paul speaks of the gifts of the Spirit.
  - a. This section begins at 12.1 with the formula in Greek “*peri de*,” (“now concerning”), which indicates that Paul is answering questions put to him by the Corinthians.

- b. vv. 1-3 have discussed the criteria by which the gifts of the Spirit are to be judged.
2. The list of gifts is not exhaustive, and may be compared with those found at 12.27-30; Rom. 12.6-8; and Eph. 4.11.
    - a. The meanings assumed for these gifts is arbitrary in different Christian traditions.
  3. The Spirit both gives and operates the gift. Therefore, no one who receives a gift should be puffed up with pride.
    - a. Paul emphasizes the need to avoid pride by emphasizing unity (“one body”).
  4. The reference in v. 13 that all were made to “drink of the Spirit” is not a reference to the Eucharist.
    - a. The verb in Greek is in the “aorist” form: action begun in the past and continuing in the present.
      - i. The Spirit is active in the transformation of bread and wine in the Eucharist, but the Eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus.
      - ii. The calling of the Spirit to act on the gifts on the altar is known as the *epiklesis* (e.g., in Eucharistic Prayer A: “Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people ...”).
        1. Some in the Church will not use Eucharistic Prayer C because it contains no explicit *epiklesis*.

### **John 20.19-23**

1. The Lectionary here acts to possibly confuse the church member listening to the lessons in the pew, because this account of Jesus’ bestowal of the Spirit is on its face in conflict with that given in the lesson from Acts.
2. John here makes the point that Jesus fulfills His promises to the disciples that He would return in the “hour” of His exaltation/glorification (cf. Luke 24.36-43, 47-48).
  - a. He shows them His wounds in demonstration that the risen One is the One who was crucified.
    - i. I.e., His return and appearance is not in “spirit” only, but is actual.
  - b. The disciples rejoice in fulfillment of Jesus’ promises of renewed joy (14.19, 16.16-24).
  - c. He gives His “peace,” also a promised gift (14.27).
3. “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20.22): Earlier in John, the Spirit is characterized as divine indwelling (14.17), which flows from the exalted Jesus as a source of eternal life (7.39).
  - a. The word for spirit, *pneuma*, is the same as that for breath or wind.
4. In Luke, the Spirit is received at Pentecost (Acts 2), commissioning the disciples as witnesses.
  - a. The power of forgiveness here described is not limited to the named disciples, since John refers to the disciples in general.
    - i. The power is granted to the believing community as a whole. This power is the bestowing of forgiveness on those who believe as a result of the witness of the believing community.