

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Acts is also called the Acts of the Apostles. It's believed to be written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, and as part 2 of 2 parts of the story which begins with Jesus and ends with the Church expanding into the world. Our scripture today is perhaps the most well know of Acts, telling the birth-day story of the Church. It's a story narrative that unlocks our imagination and restructures our world view. The book was most likely written for "insiders" – Christians who were struggling to retain the boldness, faith, and confidence in the face of new internal and/or external struggles. How do you stay faithful to Jesus in a changing world? The same question we ask ourselves today.

Spirit In both Hebrew the same word (רוּחַ or ruah) and in Greek (πνεῦμα or pneuma) can mean "spirit," "breath," and "wind". In Genesis 2:7 the Spirit of God breathed life into dust and created a human being. Here the Spirit breathes life into a once cowardly disciples and creates a new man who now has the gift of bold speech (Willimon, p. 32)

PENTECOST:: The name comes from the Greek word *pentekoste* which means fiftieth. Pentecost was the celebration of the beginning of the early weeks of harvest, during the months of May and June. According to the Old Testament, you would go to the day of the celebration of Firstfruits, and beginning with that day, you would count off 50 days. The fiftieth day would be the Day of Pentecost. So Firstfruits is the beginning of the barley harvest and Pentecost is the celebration of the beginning of the wheat harvest. Since it was always 50 days after Firstfruits, and since 50 days equals seven weeks, it always came a "week of weeks" later. Therefore, they either called it the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:9).

Pentecost also was associated with the giving of the Torah to Moses and the people of Israel. A different kind of harvest. For Christians, Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks (described here in Acts 2).

Some readers see this story as signifying that the division of Babel has been reversed (as told in Genesis 11:1-9).

* The list of nations isn't clear. One scholar, Daniel Marguerat believes that it's a tour of the world tour as someone from the Middle East of the Roman Empire would experience it. In any case, the list is meant to invoke the whole world.

Acts 2:1-21
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION

¹On the day of PENTECOST all the Lord's followers were together in one place. ² Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty **wind!** It filled the house where they were meeting. ³ Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there. ⁴ The Holy **Spirit** took control of everyone, and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak.

⁵ Many religious Jews from every country in the world were living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And when they heard this noise, a crowd gathered. But they were *surprised*, because they were hearing everything in their own languages. ⁷ They were *excited* and *amazed*, and said:

Don't all these who are speaking come from Galilee? ⁸ Then why do we hear them speaking our very own languages? ⁹ Some of us are from Parthia, Media, and Elam. Others are from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya near Cyrene, Rome, ¹¹ Crete, and Arabia.* Some of us were born Jews, and others of us have chosen to be Jews. Yet we all hear them using our own languages to tell the wonderful things God has done.

¹² Everyone was excited and confused. Some of them even kept asking each other, "What does all this mean?"

¹³ Others made fun of the Lord's followers and said, "They are drunk."

¹⁴ Peter stood with the eleven apostles and spoke in a loud and clear voice to the crowd:

Friends and everyone else living in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I have to say! ¹⁵ You are wrong to think that these people are drunk. After all, it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ But this is what God told *the prophet Joel* to say,

¹⁷ "When the last days come,
I will give my **Spirit** to everyone.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your young men will see visions,

and your old men will have dreams.

¹⁸ In those days I will give my **Spirit** to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ "I will work miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below.

There will be blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be as red as blood before the great and wonderful day of the Lord appears.

²¹ Then the Lord will save everyone.

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION

³ Now I want you to know that if you are led by God's **Spirit**, you will say that Jesus is Lord, and you will never *curse Jesus*.

⁴ There are different kinds of *spiritual gifts*, but they all come from the same **Spirit**. ⁵ There are different ways to *serve* the same Lord, ⁶ and we can each *do* different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.

⁷ The **Spirit** has given each of us a special way of serving others. ⁸ Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same **Spirit**. ⁹ To others the **Spirit** has given great faith or the power to heal the sick ¹⁰ or the power to work mighty miracles. Some of us are prophets, and some of us recognize when God's **Spirit** is present. Others can speak different kinds of languages, and still others can tell what these languages mean. ¹¹ But it is the **Spirit** who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us.

¹² The *body of Christ* has many different parts, just as any other body does. ¹³ Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God's **Spirit** baptized each of us and made us part of the *body of Christ*. Now we each drink from that same **Spirit**.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- The story of Pentecost is whimsical and powerful. It invites us to a new way of seeing both the world and our neighbor. What do you think is the point or purpose of the story?
- Remember that Paul writes this letter to the ancient Church of Corinth which is divided over issues of morality, and jealousy & rivalry likely stemming from convictions of ethnic superiority and class privilege. What does he tell them about unity?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

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1 Corinthians is the first of two pastoral letters written by the Apostle Paul to the ancient church in Corinth (Greece) while he was staying in the town of Ephesus. The letter is his clarification upon a number of matters after having received disconcerting news of the community in Corinth regarding jealousies, rivalry, and immoral behavior. Ancient Corinth was one of the largest and most important cities of Greece, with a population of 90,000 in 400 BC. The Romans demolished Corinth in 146 BC, built a new city in its place in 44 BC which became a major city in Southern Greece and eventually the provincial capital of Greece. As an ancient metropolis, Corinth had a large mixed population of Romans, Greeks, and Jews. This multi-cultural cosmopolitanism is found within the Church to which Paul writes.

curse Jesus:: or deny Jesus' lordship, which is the opposite of saying that Jesus is Lord. As we say in Acts 2 – the ability to repent, the possession of the Spirit, and faith itself are gifts of God.

spiritual gifts:: χάρισμα or /charisma/ - the operation of grace (divine favor), i.e. a grace-endowment to edify the Church. Paul also talks of *service* (διακονία /diakonia/ ministry; active service, done with a willing (voluntary) attitude. And *do things* :: ἐνέργημα or /energéma/ -- a working, an effect, operation or energizing which is the results of God's "energy" (power) in people living in His faith. Throughout Paul focuses upon the diversity of actions that serve to advance a single, unified purpose.

The body of Christ:: The Romans divided society into two groups with regard to honor: the *honestiores*, or privileged and "honorable" strata of society, and the *humiliores*, who did not qualify for reasons of birth, lack of wealth, or education to be among the elite. Paul talks of a quite different way of structuring the community.