

the Temple, opens their homes to each other, praises God, has the goodwill of the community, and is daily growing in number.

Read the Bible passage:

Acts 2: 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Does this simply get filed in the 'how things used to be' drawer alongside our memories of a full church and thriving Sunday School and be reminisced about; or could it be an inspiration for our future?

Read through the passage again and think about what aspects of it we do now, what we don't, and what we could?

ACT: At the first station you were asked to reflect on what the word Church brought to mind. Now again on the table are pieces of paper spelling out the word CHURCH.

In light of your journey through Acts 2 what words, dreams, events, or people does that word bring to mind now?

Write a word or short sentence on the paper.

When you are ready leave the worship space.

Feel free to sit, away from the tables, for a while if you'd like.



Vision4Life
Transforming the church

PRAYER STATIONS: Pentecost



Pentecost is regarded as the birthday of the Christian Church, and the start of the Church's mission to the world.

We are going to share, and offer to the community around us, a series of prayer stations reflecting on the story of Pentecost as we read it in Acts chapter 2.

A prayer station is a space created to aid reflection. Around the church there are numbered spaces for you to visit in turn. For each there will be a visual image, a reading from the Bible (NRSV), and an action to undertake.

Acts continues Luke's telling of the Jesus story. In Luke's Easter 'two men in dazzling clothes' greet the women at the empty tomb, Jesus accompanies two unaware disciples to Emmaus, he appears to them all in Jerusalem and leads them to Bethany where he ascends to heaven. In Acts Luke expands the timeline and content to 'forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God' between Easter and Ascension.

Luke presents us with fifty days of private preparation for the disciples. Forty days with the presence of the risen Christ and ten days of devoted prayer and the election of Matthias to replace Judas. Then the day of Pentecost arrives and the Church explodes onto the scene.

The prayer stations will each focus on a different part of the story of Pentecost from Acts chapter 2. They will use different styles and ways of praying, and include different symbolic actions as you reflect and journey through the story.

Prayer is a very individual thing. We each understand it and do it differently, so some of these stations will be more or less tuned to your personality and prayer life. Please try each of them, but do not worry if you spend more time at some and less at others.

If any of them make you feel uncomfortable please don't worry. For instance: if you'd rather not write something down just reflect on the word and when you are ready move on.

Please keep any conversation to a minimum.

Prayer is how we draw closer to God, how we share our concerns, our hopes, how we take our focus away from ourselves and put it on God.

So as you journey through the story of Pentecost may God bless that journey as you read, reflect, act and pray!

Rev'd David Coaker

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Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

The first followers of Jesus fitted into an upper room but after one speech 'three thousand persons were added' to their number.

Wouldn't that cause a headache if that happened here? How would we seat them, give them a cup of tea after the service, or organize the rota's? But what a wonderful headache to have!

The first followers were cowering in an upper room, the Holy Spirit bursts in, and suddenly a growing community is formed.

ACT: The community grew because people heard the message and responded. Who could you invite to Church, maybe not immediately to the worship service but to a social event or group? Reflect on their name(s) and about what part within the whole life of our church they might enjoy. (And then in the next week or so, ask them.)

Station 8 *Life among the Believers*

A new community is formed that devotes itself 'to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers', lives in awe because of the 'wonders and signs' done by the apostles', shares 'all things in common', spends time in

In this speech Peter has argued that it is the power of God's Spirit which is flowing through the disciples because of the work of God in Christ. He has quoted Joel to declare the good news of God's kingdom is for all people. He has quoted from Psalm 16 and 110 to show that Jesus is greater than King David. He has held together their ancestry, the events of the recent Passover festival, and shown the crowd that the man they crucified is 'both Lord and Messiah'.

At the time of Jesus it was a time of great expectation amongst the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah. This person would be a great warrior and king, like David. He would free them from Roman rule, where Caesar was Lord; and bring a new Kingdom, where God would be Lord. 'Messiah' means 'Anointed One'. The Greek word for Messiah is Christos which gives us the word Christ.

ACT: On the table is a piece of paper with a list of other titles of Jesus from the Bible. Read through them. Which do you prefer? Are there any you'd never heard before? Do they all make sense to you? Reflect on these titles for a while before you move on.

Station 7 *The First Converts*

Peter hasn't pulled any punches with his speech. He has shown them how crucial Jesus is to God and charged them with complicity in his death. Unsurprisingly the crowd are 'cut to the heart' and want to know what they can do.

Peter echoes the words of the prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus, and tells them to repent, be baptised, forgiven, and share in the gift of the Holy Spirit that has filled the disciples. The crowd responds and the Church is born.

Read the Bible passage:

Station 1 *Pentecost*

Pentecost isn't a word the Church created; it's one that we have adopted from Judaism.

Pentecost comes from a Jewish harvest festival called Shavuot. It is also known as the festival or feast of 'Weeks' because when we translate it from the Greek Pentecost means 'fifty days'.

There is no set date for the two-day festival of Shavuot, but it takes place seven weeks (fifty days) after the first day of the spring festival of Passover. This also marks the start of the wheat harvest and the end of the barley harvest. It marks the time that the Jews received the Torah on Mount Sinai.

This is another major Jewish Festival, and just like the Passover which was the first Easter, the city of Jerusalem would have been full of Jewish pilgrims from around the Mediterranean.

Read the Bible passage:

Acts 2:1a When the day of Pentecost had come

Just as Easter is set by the lunar Jewish calendar for Passover, Pentecost comes seven weeks after then.

So fifty days after the first Easter the disciples gather and the Church is born!

ACT: On the table are pieces of paper spelling out the word CHURCH. What words, memories, events, or people does that word bring to mind? Write a word or a short sentence on the paper.

Station 2 *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*

This is the event that transformed this Pentecost into the Christian festival we celebrate today.

The Holy Spirit has a long history in the Hebrew Bible from the wind blowing over the waters of Creation to the power that filled the prophets.

At this Pentecost it is given a Christian understanding as the life of Christ within the community of believers that we call the Church, the body of Christ.

Read the Bible passage:

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

The followers of Jesus were all gathered in one place. The story begins with unity and then the Spirit bursts in.

The silence of prayer turns into the roar of a tornado. The calm of contemplation becomes a fire burning within them. The peace of shared devotion becomes the babble of the cosmopolitan market-place.

ACT: On the table are a central candle and some tea lights. Take a tea light, reflect on this opening passage and the candle, and when you are ready light a tea light and place it on the table.

Station 6 *Fellow Israelites*

The speech concludes with Peter acknowledging his shared heritage with the crowd. Rather than the condemnation for their part in Jesus' Passion Peter now draws them close and contrasts Jesus with David, Israel's idealised king.

Peter argues that as David died and was buried in the normal way the words of Psalm 16 are to be read as a prophecy about the Messiah. David did not ascend but Jesus did, and the disciples are standing before the crowd as witnesses to this. The proof of this is their speech through the power of God's Spirit that the crowd have already witnessed for themselves.

In verse 34 Peter quotes Psalm 110:1, again using the words of the Psalms as prophecy about Jesus. Peter's speech closes with the declaration of Jesus as 'both Lord and Messiah' and the charge to the crowd that it was they that crucified him.

Read the Bible passage:

Acts 2:29 "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'
³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool." ' ³⁶
Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Station 5 *You that are Israelites*

Peter's speech continues as he declares Jesus as the embodiment of God's will through 'deeds of power, wonders, and signs', he charges the crowd with complicity in Jesus' arrest and death at the hands of the Romans, he declares Jesus' vindication through God's act of Resurrection, and this section closes with him quoting Psalm 16:8–11.

Read the Bible passage:

Acts 2:22 "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵ For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

Reflect on the beginning of the quote from Psalm 16:

'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.'

ACT: Keep rereading this quote and as you do look closely at your right hand. Keep the words running through your mind as you turn your hand over looking at the back and palm, your nails, knuckles, joints, any rings you're wearing, and any other distinguishing marks. When you are ready read the quotation one last time and move on.

Station 3 *Every nation under heaven*

The next passage sends a shiver down the spine of every person on the rota for reading the Bible in worship. It's full of strange and difficult to pronounce names.

Why is it so important that they are all mentioned?

Read the Bible passage:

Acts 2:5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

The crowd was full of 'devout Jews from every nation under heaven'. The list includes nations from throughout the Jewish diaspora (Jewish communities based outside of Israel), both within and without the Roman Empire, but centred on Jerusalem - not Rome.

This can be interpreted as either the disciples' speaking in tongues (glossolalia), or as a symbolic reversal of the Tower of Babel story. At Babel God confounded humanity with multiple languages because of our attempts to build a tower to reach God.

Here by speaking the Gospel of Christ the constraints of language are broken down. The kingdom of God that Jesus declared unites rather than divides, it brings people together rather than separates them.

ACT: On the table is a pile of cards with envelopes. Who do you need to send a message to? Who deserves a thank you, needs to know you're thinking about them, or should you apologise to?

Write the note, seal the envelope, write their name on the front, and decide whether to address and post it when you get home.

Station 4 *Peter Addresses the Crowd*

The next three stations reflect on Peter's speech to the crowd. Peter assures them of the disciples' sobriety, explains what is happening by reflecting on the words of the prophet Joel, summarises the life of Jesus, and takes authority for Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection from the words of David - Israel's idealised king.

Peter tells the crowd it's only breakfast time so they're sober, their ecstatic speech is because they are filled with God's Spirit as the prophet's of old.

Read the Bible passage:

Acts 2:14 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. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ '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. ...

Acts 2:18 ... Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ 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.'

The first part of the speech answers the crowd's question 'What does this mean?' As it is only nine o'clock in the morning the disciples cannot be drunk, on the contrary, this is an event predicted in Scripture.

The quote from Joel 2:28–32 makes three key statements about the disciples' message: (1) Their ecstatic speech is linked to the Old Testament prophets Spirit-filled words. (2) There is an apocalyptic element. This is an event of 'the last days' for Luke, Jesus' arrival was the beginning of the end-times and they are living in the 'now but not yet' of the end of time. (3) The promise is inclusive of age, gender, and social class; the Spirit is poured out on 'all flesh', and 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord' is saved.

The Spirit of God is there for everyone. Everyone through attending to God, praying, and sharing; can prophesy, dream and have vision.

ACT: On the table is a copy of the speech "I Have a Dream" which was delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. on the 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

Read it through and then highlight **one** word that jumps out at you.