

a moment to wait – a time to pray *Acts 1:1-26*

thought for the week

Luke begins the second part of his account of the ministry of Jesus (verse 1). The theme of continuity runs through the entire account (verse 2), connecting how the words and works of Jesus live on through the ministry of His followers, the early Church. Jesus promises that such continuity is possible due to the ministry of the promised Holy Spirit – the spirit and power of Jesus, poured out upon all those who seek to follow Him (verse 8). The release of such spiritual power and energy was to disperse His followers and His message throughout the known world, radiating out from Jerusalem. Jesus would no longer be present among His followers physically – He would be hidden from view (verse 9), yet His work would continue, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit among His followers. The book of Acts is a record of that work. Before that work could advance there were some important human resource issues to resolve – finding a replacement for the betrayer, Judas and some spiritual preparation, coming together to wait on God in prayer (verse 14).

verse for the week

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1 verse 8

image for the week



prayer for the week

Holy Spirit of God
We watch for you, we wait for you,
We look for you, we long for you.
Come, Holy Spirit, renew us, refresh
us, restore us and inspire us that we
might live and work to your glory
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who
with you, O Spirit, are with the
Father, one God for ever.

Amen.

David Adam

reflection for each day

day one

...after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

There was nothing accidental about Jesus' choice of His disciples – even Judas had a role to play in God's unfolding plan. Now Jesus, entrusts His ministry not just to his immediate disciples, but to all those who follow Him. How do you respond to the idea of Jesus entrusting you with His ministry?

day two

*'Do not leave Jerusalem but **wait** for the gift my Father promised.'*

Waiting is part of obedience to Jesus. We cannot do anything for Jesus in our own power or out of our own motivation. Consider what you are waiting for from Jesus at this moment.

day three

'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

The disciples still expect Jesus to bring about an earthly kingdom. Jesus gently re-directs their attention to a spiritual new beginning. How has Jesus challenged you to look at the world differently?

day four

He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Jesus ascends to His Father, yet He is only hidden from sight within a cloud of God's presence or glory. How does this make you feel about Jesus' presence or absence from us?

day five

'This same Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way.'

We are promised a different kind of second coming of Jesus – no longer in weakness and obscurity, but in power and in glory. How does this make you feel?

day six

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women

Here is a picture of a diverse group held together in prayer, expectancy and purpose. Peter emerges among them, but they are a community who had lived and worked with Jesus – a movement seeking to move on.

day seven

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of those who have been with us

Matthias is often overlooked, but his election reminds us that there were many who followed Jesus outside of the 12 disciples. What does this tell you about who Jesus is seeking to share His ministry with?

for the group

as you gather...

- Luke shows that the stories of Jesus' life and especially his resurrection arise from the reliable first hand accounts of witnesses to the event (verse 3). It is from among such witnesses that the early church takes shape in Jerusalem. Why was it so important to gather together in Jerusalem (verse 4)?
- What kind of baptism is promised (verse 5)? How would this differ from John's baptism?
- The energy for mission released by the coming of the Holy Spirit extends outwards from Jerusalem in radiating circles of impact (verse 8). Mission begins from where we are to extend to the ends of the earth, but always starts locally and in relatively small ways. How does this understanding connect with your own experience of mission locally and more widely?
- What appeals to you about this picture of Jesus' ascension (verses 9-11) and what do you find troubling or difficult to understand?
- Peter emerges as the leader of this group of early believers (verse 15). The one who denied Jesus (Luke 22:54-62) now stands tall as a leader and man of faith. What does this tell us about our own failing?
- How do you react to Matthias' election? What does this tell us about God's recognition of those who often stand on the margins of the big stories?

prayer for the group

As we gather here in the harbour of your safety

We thank you for fellowship and family.

We ask that you will strengthen us, restore us and inspire us with your love.

Lord, would you fill us with your peace

So that as we journey onwards

We would pour out your love and grace to others.

We ask that our souls would catch the wind of your spirit

so that we would take your promises to all the earth.

Amen.



continue the conversation

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Apprentice

mission begins

Acts 2:1-41

thought for the week

On the day of Pentecost (a Jewish harvest festival), the believers were all together, but totally unprepared for what followed. It is must have been difficult to describe what then took place, but there are signs of power being unleashed (verse 2) and a shared experience of overwhelming heat. Fire and wind are often associated with an extraordinary display of God's presence (Exodus 3:1-6; Ezekiel 37:7-14). This experience was so overwhelming that it carried the believers beyond existing language into utterances that could be understood by the multi-lingual population that swelled Jerusalem during the festival. A newly emboldened Peter stands up to make sense of what is taking place (verse 14), he immediately connects this phenomenon with that which was spoken about by the prophet Joel centuries before. He connects the newness of baptism in the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, with the ancient promises of God. This is more than an unusual experience, it was a sign of a profound new beginning, God had acted supremely in Jesus, revealing Him as Christ, the messiah (verse 36) who now calls all people to embrace his message and call (verse 38). This inclusive revelation and call marks the very beginning or birth date of a new community – the Church.

verse for the week

'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus...'

Acts 2 verse 38

prayer for the week

Come Holy Spirit
 Fill the hearts of your faithful people.
 Kindle in them the fire of your love.
 Send forth your Spirit
 and they shall be created
 And you shall renew
 the face of the earth.
 Amen.

image for the week



reflection for each day

day one

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began...

The Holy Spirit is constantly crossing human boundaries to bring about new beginnings. This work is inclusive of all people irrespective of age, background or culture. ASK for the eyes of faith in order to see where the Holy Spirit is at work breaking down human boundaries in the world around us?

day two

'Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'

Making sense of what God is doing in the world can be perplexing. Peter later points to the BIG PICTURE of God's saving work in history. What are you confused about in terms of where God is working in your life? ASK him to show you His BIG PICTURE.

day three

'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.'

The promise of the Holy Spirit is for everyone. Have you experienced such a pouring out or filling in your own life? ASK God to fill you with the power of His Holy Spirit now.

day four

'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'

We are saved from lost lives and self-centred purpose by the work of Jesus. Who do you know who is spiritually lost? Pray for them, that they might come into a living relationship of faith, following the way of Jesus.

day five

'But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death.'

The message of the resurrection of Jesus was central to the teaching of the early Church. How can we help people to understand the importance of this message for them today?

day six

God has made this Jesus... both Lord and Christ.

Christ means 'anointed by God' whereas the title: 'Lord' reminds us that He wants to reign over all of our lives – to be Lord of all. What would it mean to you if Jesus was Lord of every part of your life?

day seven

'The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call'

God is calling everyone into a relationship with Him. What does this call mean to you and to those close to you?

for the group

as you gather...

- Why did the crowd react in the way they did (verses 5-13)? What provokes a reaction to the gospel today?
- Why do you think Luke mentions the number of nations represented in Jerusalem? What challenge and encouragement does that give?
- How does the gift of tongues at Pentecost relate to the confusion of language seen in the Tower of Babel story (see: *Genesis 11.1-9*)?
- With a flash of insight and power, Peter goes on to proclaim the gospel. Can we directly apply parts of the Bible to events today and say, “this is that” (verse 16)? How do we know when prophecy has been fulfilled?
- “What shall we do?” (verse 37). Deeply troubled by Peter’s words, many were anxious to make amends, but how could they? Look at Peter’s answer in verses 38-39. What three steps need to be taken? What is the significance of each step? Which of those steps do you find most difficult? What do we have to do in order to ‘receive’ the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- How does the idea of receiving the Holy Spirit make you feel?

prayer for the group

*Faithful God,
 Who fulfilled the promises of Easter
 by sending your Holy Spirit
 and opening to every race
 and nation the way of eternal life;
 open our lips by your Spirit,
 that every tongue may tell of your glory;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.*

Church of England - Common Worship



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Apprentice

community forms; mission flourishes Acts 2:42-4:4

thought for the week

Community starts to form in a radical way. This community is shaped by two important practices and forces – the togetherness of the believers, waiting on God in prayer and the powerful transformative ministry energised to go out in mission by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We gain an insight into the practices of the early believers – studying the scriptures, sharing a common life and breaking bread together (verse 42). They also exercised a ministry of works as well as words – healing and demonstrating miraculous signs of Jesus' risen presence (verse 43) – common ownership, generosity, hospitality and economic equality (verses 44-45) – worshipping in large, formal gatherings and small, informal settings – as a gathered and dispersed community (verse 46). Luke then goes on to give some practical examples – showing Peter and John in the Temple, healing a crippled beggar as an example of Jesus' resurrection power (chapter 3 verse 26) and using such occasions to proclaim the good news of Jesus in a way that transformed many lives (chapter 4 verse 4).

verse for the week

'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'

Acts 2 verse 47

prayer for the week

*Christ has no body on earth
now but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours;
yours are the eyes through which he
looks with compassion on the world;
yours are the feet with which he
walks to do good;
yours are the hands with which he
blesses all the world.*

St Teresa of Avila

image for the week



reflection for each day

day one

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer

Here is a picture of the early Church at its most simple, yet most radical and missional state. Using this description as a menu or agenda, how are you relating to other believers in such a way?

day two

All the believers were together and had everything in common

Here is a description of the values and lifestyle that the early believers practised. What do you find challenging about these and what do you find inspirational?

day three

'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus, walk.'

Spiritual wealth and material poverty are often linked, whilst the inverse can also be true. What does this tell you about what we should be seeking to accomplish in life?

day four

He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

The resurrection power of Jesus is displayed in the ministry of those who act in His name empowered by the Holy Spirit. Pray for the resurrection power of Jesus to be displayed in a situation of powerlessness and poverty.

day five

'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you?'

God can often surprise us. Peter's response here is to remind his hearers of the amazing power and love of God which can be so easily overlooked or forgotten. What has God reminded you, about Himself recently?

day six

You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked a murdered be released to you.

There is a warning in these accounts that although Jesus came for us all, yet we still have the capacity to reject his call. Pray for those you know who appear to reject Jesus.

day seven

They seized Peter and John

There is a cost to following Jesus and an even greater one to proclaiming his message before a hostile audience. In what way does following Jesus today have a cost for us? Pray for those followers who are imprisoned or persecuted for their faith in Jesus.

for the group

as you gather...

- What strikes you most about the way that the early followers of Jesus lived? What practices and disciplines do you feel prompted to consider for your own shared life?
- How can we live more radically like these early believers today? What old practices would have to change? What new practices could be embraced?
- Despite their new experiences of God, Peter and John retain their links with the Temple and Jewish religious ritual. What can this tell us about working for change within existing Church structures?
- What do you understand as a miracle? What experiences do you have of the miraculous?
- What does (chapter 3 verse 14) tell us about man's rejection of God? What signs of rejection do we see today?
- Peter emphasises the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy in the life, rejection, death and resurrection of Jesus. Why was this so important to his audience? Is it still important to people today? How would you phrase such an important message to members of another faith today?

prayer for the group

*God, we confess our human struggles before You:
our deflated dreams after years of trying so hard,
our uphill battles against despair.
You see and know us, inside and out.
Our cravings for control when chaos surrounds,
our burnt-out quests for justice,
our disillusionment with less-than-perfect community.
God, we need a breakthrough of Your Spirit.
We need some juice for the long-haul!
Zest us with hope,
and renew us with Your Living Word today. Amen.*

Katerina Friesen



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Apprentice

opposition and the power of prayer *Acts 4:5-31*

thought for the week

Peter and John continue Jesus' ministry of healing. The authorities respond by putting them on trial before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish parliament) and by issuing a command not to speak in the name of Jesus. However, the Church can no more stop speaking in the name of Jesus than Tesco can stop selling people goods and services!

The Sadducees were the theological liberals of their time, who denied the possibility of resurrection. Such teaching took place in the Temple precinct giving further offence to the Sadducees and warranting the arrest of Peter and John. The priesthood was hereditary and during this time a family of priests effectively controlled the Temple. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas and still retained great influence even though he was no longer the 'High Priest'. The High Priesthood therefore operated as an elite – they even had their own exclusive walkway between the High Priest's house and the Temple in order to avoid mixing with ordinary people. Therefore, issues of "power" and "name" were important to the maintenance of religious and political control.

verse for the week

*All the believers were one in heart
and mind.*

Acts 4 verse 32

image for the week



prayer for the week

*Now, Lord,
Consider what threatens our faith
and enable your servants to speak
your word with great boldness.
Stretch out your hand to heal and
perform signs and wonders
through the name of your holy
servant Jesus.*

Amen.

reflection for each day

day one

'By what power or what name did you do this?'

The religious leaders were more concerned with the technical and doctrinal issues that arose from their traditions, than they were with seeing the power of God displayed in someone's life. Where do you see this tendency in yourself or in others around you today?

day two

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth... that this man stands before you completely healed.

Here is continuity displayed between the time-framed, ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the global, age-less ministry of Jesus today. Why is praying 'in the name of Jesus' so important?

day three

'Salvation is found in no-one else'

Here is an exclusive claim for the power of Jesus to save us from our sin and to connect us with God's saving purposes. How do you respond to such a bold claim?

day four

'We must warn these men to speak no longer in this name.'

Never has such an official instruction been so universally rejected. The early Church defined itself by acts of civil disobedience, refusing to stop speaking in Jesus' name. How are we charged today with the command to speak out for Jesus and for what He stands for?

day five

'Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak out with great boldness'

The believers don't pray for the end of their persecution, but for boldness in the light of such persecution. What does this tell you about how we should pray?

day six

There were no needy persons among them

The early Church practices a form of economic collectivism, sharing possessions, supporting the needy and giving sacrificially. Is this over simplistic and idealistic or can this teach us about how we should live today?

day seven

Joseph... sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles feet.

Here is a practical example of the way the early Church lived. Joseph, later called, Barnabas (the encourager) emerges as a significant character and leader. His example was to prove formative as the church grew.

for the group

as you gather...

- Does name, status or background still determine the opportunities available to people today? How does the ministry of Jesus come into conflict with powerful people, ideas and institutions today?
- Peter's courage in the light of such intimidation is extraordinary (verses 8-12). Give examples of occasions when YOU have received extraordinary power in intimidating or difficult circumstances.
- When God has done something wonderful in our lives we cannot stop talking about it (verse 20). Try to recall times of blessing and how this has affected you. How should we speak out for our faith and values today?
- What is the role of the church in civil disobedience and protest?
- Look at the believers prayer in verses 23-30. What does this prayer draw upon in order to find courage and hope? How does it use scripture to help them understand what is happening to them? What does it draw upon in order to pray boldly for courage and endurance?
- What most impresses you about the way that the early believers lived (verses 32-37)? How could this translate in your situation today?

prayer for the group

For those suffering because of their Christian faith, that the Holy Spirit may fortify them with the courage to remain strong in faith, as well as with the charity to forgive their persecutors,

We pray to the Lord.

For your faithful who suffer for your name's sake, that you would grant them a spirit of patience and charity, that they may be found true and faithful witnesses to the promises you have made,

We pray to the Lord.

For those who suffer persecution for their faithful service to you, that they may rejoice to be united to the sacrifice of Christ your Son and may know that their names are written in heaven among the company of the elect,

We pray to the Lord.

For Christians in (insert name here...) that they may be granted courage, hope, and perseverance as they bear heroic witness to their faith in this time of persecution,

We pray to the Lord.



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