

LIVING THE WORD—Week 13 (Sun., April 19 – Sat., Apr. 25)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God's Relentless Love

Pentecost (Part 1)—God's Spirit Creates His Church

John 13:34-35; 17:20-23; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:1-16;
Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 3:12-17; Hebrews 10:19-25

Key Verse: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

Just seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection at Passover, God acts again in his mighty power. On the day of Pentecost (another of the major religious festivals in Israel), God pours out his Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers. This was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Isaiah 44:1-5); but more importantly, a fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus and John the Baptist (Luke 3:15-17; 24:45-49; Acts 1:4-8; 2:32-39).

Over the next two Sundays we will consider two important aspects of the mighty act of God pouring out his Spirit. This week we look at how God's Spirit created a new people, the church. Next week, in conjunction with the weekend with Randy Harris, we will look at how the indwelling Spirit transforms our own hearts and lives.

As our new memory verse states, "there is one body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4-6). At Pentecost God's Spirit was poured out on Jews and at Cornelius' house on Gentiles (Acts 11:15-18), creating one new body in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22). Because all believers are empowered by the same Spirit, they are part of the same body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).

Being filled with the Spirit transforms our lives together (Eph. 5:18-21) and failure to live together in love grieves the Holy Spirit (4:25-5:2). The fruit of the Spirit in our lives especially impacts our relationships through love, peace, patience, and kindness (Galatians 5:13-26). The Spirit of God in us will move us toward greater unity (Eph. 4:1-3). If we are not growing into deeper unity and greater love, then something besides the Spirit of Christ is at work in us.

The first disciples of Jesus on whom the Holy Spirit was poured became a community devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship or sharing with each other, to eating and breaking bread together, and to praying and praising God together (Acts 2:42-47). They loved each other as Jesus had loved them—because Jesus himself was in them.

Next Week: Pentecost—Part 2 (Acts 2:32-39; Romans 8:1-17; Gal. 5:13-26; Eph. 3:14-21)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 13-16): Ephesians 4:4-6

On the Mountain ("*Love God*")—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Find a time when you can sit alone and uninterrupted. Spend a few moments preparing your heart to meditate on your relationship with God.
2. Read Ephesians 4:4-6 and begin to commit it to memory, storing it in your heart.
3. Reflect on how we share each of these things in common with other believers, including the one faith we talked about last week and the one Spirit of Christ in all of us.
4. Thank God for each of these things one at a time and pray to know them more deeply.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. Remembering the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18, why do you think Peter and other early Christians had so much trouble grasping that God accepted everyone from every nation who believed in Jesus? Who might some Christians today be surprised to find God accepts?
2. In what ways do the seven things listed in Ephesians 4:4-6 unite us as believers in Christ? How does what we believe or practice related to any of these seven things sometimes divide us?
3. What does Hebrews 10:19-25 suggest is the primary purpose of Christians meeting together? How do gatherings of Christians today fit into that purpose?
4. What is one fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) that you would like to see grow more fully in your life? Can you think of an example of someone who models that in his or her life?
5. Do you have anything to share from your time with God, your family, or in the world?
6. If there is time, discuss the “In the World” section below.
7. Pray using the Lord’s Prayer as a guide. Pray especially that the kingdom would come in our lives and in the world.

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. What things do we do in our church that are like what the first Christians did in Acts 2:42 (being devoted to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers)?
2. Read John 13:34-35. Do you know people that are sometimes hard to love? What makes them hard to love?
3. Do you think Jesus sometimes might find us hard to love? How does he love us anyway?

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. Read Acts 2:36-47; 4:32-37. What impact did the life and message of the early Christians have on people around them?
2. How did their lives flow out of the message of Jesus’ resurrection?
3. If the unity and generosity of the first Christians was a powerful witness to the world, what do you think the world sees in the church today?
4. Would you ever consider selling something valuable to help others? Under what circumstances?