

The Holy Spirit Comes

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

If you ask a group of people how the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, some will say through tongues of fire while others will say that Jesus breathed on them. We get the first image from today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The second image comes from John's Gospel. How the apostles historically received the gift of the Spirit is less important than what resulted when the Spirit filled them. In both stories, the apostles changed from a group in hiding, fearful for their lives, to bold and confident proclaimers of God's great works through Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good and Gracious God,
thank you for this gathering to reflect on your Word of Life.

Open our eyes and ears
so that we may see and hear the message
you have for us today.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-23

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

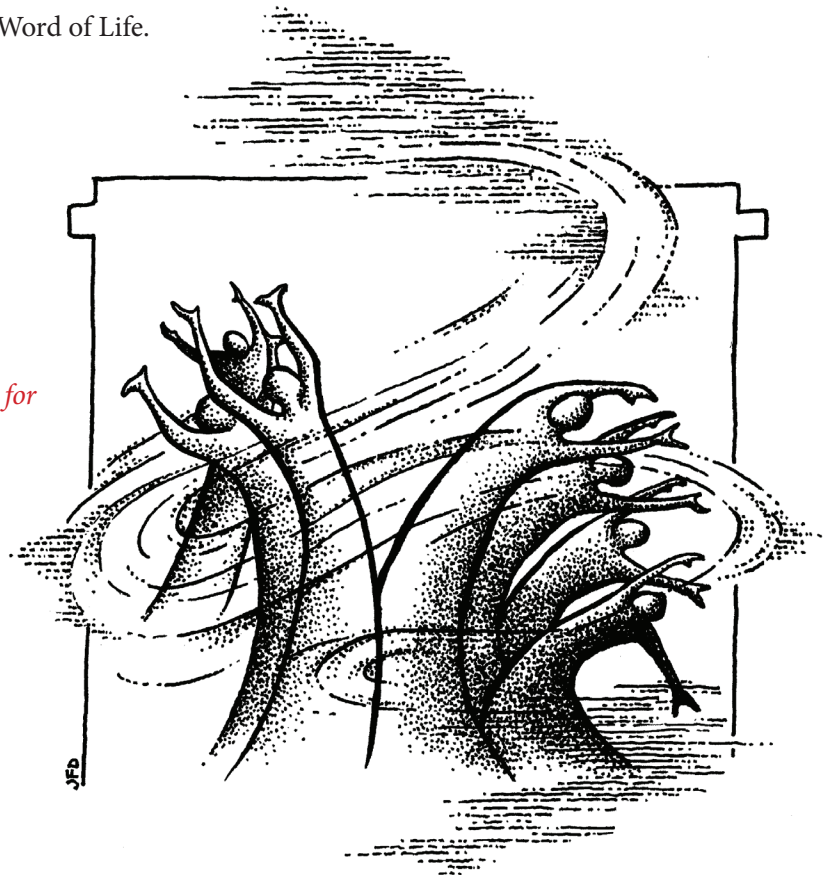
Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

May 31, 2020 • Year A

Pentecost Sunday

- ▶ Acts 2:1-11 - Apostles receive the gift of tongues
- ▶ 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 - One body in Christ
- ▶ John 20:19-23 - "Receive the Holy Spirit"



Reflections on the Reading

Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus breathed on the apostles just as God breathed life into the first human. Like the readings from John's Gospel that we've heard the last few weeks, Jesus is showing his friends that he is one and the same as God. Just as the first human came alive with God's breath, so the apostles come alive in a new way when they receive the Holy Spirit.

Before the coming of the Spirit, they were a fearful, closed group, hiding out, paralyzed to continue Jesus' ministry of healing and teaching. Once Jesus came to them and offered them his peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they immediately transformed. Rejoicing replaced fear, and the willingness to move outward to minister to others replaced their desire for safety.

After Jesus breathed on the disciples, he tells them, "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." This verse is often interpreted as the origin of priests' authority to forgive sins, but it applies to all of us. Jesus is pointing out the power we all have in choosing how we respond to hurt. When we forgive others, we not only free them from our anger and resentment, we free ourselves from carrying those emotions. On the other hand, if we retain someone's sins by refusing to forgive them, we are holding ourselves bound by anger, resentment, blame, and hurt. We are just as much the prisoner in the relationship. Our refusal to forgive affects not only the offending person, but us, as well.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① When have you experienced the Holy Spirit inspiring, guiding, or emboldening you?
- ② When have you had the privileged experience of watching someone else move from fear to courage? How did God/the Holy Spirit play a role in that?
- ③ When have you experienced freedom by being forgiven by someone? When have you been able to free someone else by offering forgiveness?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Jesus, may what we have heard and discussed today inspire us to leave here committed to living as more faithful disciples.

Amen.