

Peter's Pentecost

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

6th in a seven-part series

May 28, 2023

©2023 Scott L. Engle

Acts 2:14–36 (NRSV)

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.

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.’

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.’

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.”

What has the Spirit wrought?

What must Peter have thought when he looked back on that terrible night when Jesus had been arrested and hauled before Caiaphas, the high priest. During their last meal together, Jesus had foreseen Peter's weakness, his cut and run attitude when things would get their toughest. Peter, in his unthinking enthusiasm, had told Jesus that he was ready to go with him to prison and even death . . . but Jesus knew better. He told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed at sunrise.

In the garden, Peter had slept while his Lord prayed in anguish over the ordeal that lay ahead. When the priests and soldiers arrived, Peter had stood on the outside, withdrawing from the crowd, distancing himself from the unfolding tragedy. As Jesus was led away, Peter had kept his distance, an observer only, neither a participant nor a defender.

And then, to his great everlasting shame, Peter had denied Jesus three times in quick succession. Each time, someone had said that they recognized Peter as one of those who had been following Jesus. Each time, Peter quickly and vehemently denied it. And he had wept bitterly over his weakness and his shame. Great rivers of tears had flowed in those early morning hours. But they hadn't helped. He had just walked away and stayed away until the women had come to find him on Sunday morning with their astonishing story of angels and an empty tomb.¹

Now, despite Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Peter's guilt and shame remained with him. In Jerusalem, he sat with the other believers waiting for . . . well, he wasn't sure, but Jesus had promised that there was yet more to come.

Pentecost

This weekend is the celebration of Pentecost, which has its roots in ancient Judaism and is still observed by Jews and Christians, though you'll see that there is a very big difference.

In the Jewish calendar, Pentecost, customarily called the Feast of Weeks, was the second of three major Jewish festivals, held between Passover (in early spring) and Tabernacles (in the fall). For the Jews, Pentecost was an agricultural festival, during which the community would show gratitude to God for the first fruits from that year's crop, i.e., the early harvest.

Jesus was crucified during Passover in the spring. After his resurrection, Jesus spent about six weeks with various groups of disciples, teaching them and preparing them for his return to the Father. Jesus promised that after his departure, God would send the Holy Spirit to be their comforter and advocate. Jesus' disciples were to wait in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Spirit.

The Festival of Weeks, Pentecost, came soon after Jesus' departure. Because Pentecost was such a major festival, Jerusalem was stuffed with Jews from all over the Roman empire. In Acts 2, Luke tells us that the disciples were gathered together on the day of Pentecost in a room near the temple, when there was a sudden sound "like the rush of a mighty wind" and tongues of fire leapt from disciple to disciple. The crowds were astonished at this, each person hearing in his or her own language the disciples' proclamations of God's great deeds.

This outpouring of God's Spirit marked the beginning of a new age. The disciples were new creations in God's kingdom and the Holy Spirit would forever be God's empowering presence in their lives. Indeed, the rest of Acts tells the story of how the Holy Spirit guided and directed the growth and development of the early church. Though we refer to Luke's book as the Acts of the Apostles, it really ought to be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. And God's Spirit is today, for each us, God present with us, empowering us all to do God's work.

¹In Luke's account, Peter disappears from the narrative after his three-time denial of Jesus. He is not mentioned in any of Friday's events and doesn't reappear in the narrative until Sunday.

Suddenly, God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, was present with them, empowering and strengthening them all. Peter felt himself moved and when some of the gathered crowd began to accuse the believers of drunkenness, he rose to speak. The world would never be the same.²

Where did that come from?

Surely, many in the crowd drawn by the commotion that Pentecost morning knew all about Jesus, his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. And they had undoubtedly heard the claims and rumors about Jesus' having been resurrected. How could they not have heard? Two decades later, Paul would claim that 500 people had seen Jesus post-resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15). And, at least some in the crowd would have known that Peter was a fisherman from Galilee, one of those rustic rural types, perhaps illiterate and uneducated. And it is even possible that some had heard stories of Peter's denial of Jesus. It is doubtful that the three people who confronted Peter would have kept those stories to themselves. It wasn't every day that a self-professed Messiah was put on trial by Caiaphas and Pilate.

So, it isn't hard to imagine the shock and awe on the faces in the crowd, as Peter rose to speak. This fisherman was telling them that the believers were certainly not drunk. Rather, the long-awaited Day of the Lord had arrived, as promised by God through Joel and the prophets. And not only did Peter make the seemingly silly claim that the Day of the Lord had arrived,³ he proceeded to claim that his fellow Jews had killed God's Messiah: "this man . . . you crucified and killed . . . Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

I wonder which part of Peter's sermon drew the strongest reaction from the crowd. His claim that Jesus, who had been humiliatingly crucified, was Messiah and had been resurrected by God, or his charge that Jesus' blood was on the crowd's hands. The onlookers had to be standing there in slack-jawed amazement. They had never witnessed anything like it in all their lives. Surely they asked themselves, "Where did *that* come from?" They would soon learn.

Wide-eyed wonderment was not the end of the story. Peter spoke the truth to that crowd and the truth cut right into their hearts. God, again in the person of the Holy Spirit, spoke to them through Peter and the crowd knew the truth of Peter's words. God had moved with great power that morning among the believers. Now, God was moving with the same power among the crowd. They *knew* their mistake; they *knew* their guilt. And they wanted to know what to do next.

Peter's answer to them ought to surprise you a bit. He doesn't tell them, "Love Jesus," nor does he say "Let Jesus into your heart." Rather, he tells them to repent and be baptized; i.e., turn your life around, embrace Jesus' way, and enter the fellowship of believers. This was the path to the forgiveness that the crowd sought. And thousands did just that.

How does one account for a comeback such as Peter's? In six weeks, he goes from a frightened denier of Jesus to a courageous man willing to risk death by telling the crowds the truth. We know that the explanation lies with God. That the power of God's Spirit strengthened and emboldened Peter and also moved thousands of onlookers to genuine repentance. The same God, by the same Spirit, moves among us, dwelling within each of us, empowering us to do God's work – to invite, to worship, to learn, to pray, to care, to give, to serve.

²For more on the story of Pentecost, see last week's study, "The Spirit of Pentecost." All 300+ studies are posted as pdf files at www.thebibleacademy.com.

³For the Jews of Jesus day, the Day of the Lord was to be the BIG day, when God put the world right, raised all the dead, showed the world that the Jews had been right all along, and ushered in his kingdom to be ruled by God's Messiah. But on that Pentecost morning, the world looked nothing like that. It was just another Festival day in a long line of such days.

William Willimon on Peter's Speech-making

In his *Interpretation* series commentary on Acts, William Willimon offers us the following reflections on Peter's speech and the many other speeches in Luke's account:

The crowd's accusation of drunkenness serves as a cue for Peter to make a speech. Here is a pattern we will see repeated in Acts. The church is confronted by a crowd, some of whom understand and some of whom do not. An apostle speaks, interpreting the gospel through a sermon. Luke's pattern was a favorite of classical historians. Through speeches, put upon the lips of distinguished historical figures, the ancient historian interpreted the meaning of events. At first this may seem a rather unimaginative, prosaic literary convention until we remember how, in our own day, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address did more than open a cemetery—it gave meaning and substance to a national cataclysm. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech reinterpreted our history and constitution and mobilized a people into action for justice. A good speech can turn us inside out.

Furthermore, a good speech has an identifiable and memorable form. Good speakers develop a distinctive style and a particular way of dealing with their material. Even though not all speeches in Acts follow the same outline, C.H. Dodd identified a definite pattern in Acts for their presentation in apostolic *kerygma*:

1. The age of fulfillment, or the coming of the kingdom of God, is at hand (vv. 16–21).
2. This coming has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus (vv. 22–23).
3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God as the messianic head of the new Israel (vv. 24–36).
4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory (v. 33).
5. The messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the second coming of Christ.
6. Forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation come with repentance (vv. 38–39 [p. 11]).

Dodd says, "We may take it that this is what the author of Acts meant by 'preaching the kingdom of God' " (p. 24). Here is the core of apostolic preaching as portrayed in Acts. But who is the audience for this preaching? Unbelievers in the street? In our earlier discussion of the purpose of Acts, we asserted that Acts was probably written for "insiders" —Christians who were struggling to retain the boldness, faith, and confidence in the face of new internal and/or external struggles. The Luke-Theophilus dialogue was part of a long conversation between God and the people of God. Luke is the moderator between Theophilus' church and the panel of eyewitnesses of the Christ-event. It is the church's own skepticism, doubt, and despair which is the audience for Peter's speech.

Any good speech is more than *what* was said, and *to whom* it was said; it is also a matter of *how* it is said. First, Peter bluntly counters the mockers' assertion of drunkenness (vv. 14–15). Crowds had earlier made the same charge of drunkenness against Jesus himself: "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Luke 7:34). The church sees plainly that these events, experienced by the crowd as only disruptive inebriation and scandalous irrationality, are fulfillment of prophecy (vv. 14–21). Joel said that in the terrible and wonderful last days there would be an outpouring of the Spirit on everyone (Joel 2:28–32). The Spirit, once the exotic possession of a prophetic few, is now offered to all. The crowd, which also knows the Scriptures, do not see what the Scriptures so clearly prove.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *Gospel of Mark*

No class this week, as it will be Memorial Day

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

Current study: *1 Samuel*

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott's Facebook ministry page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by "Scott Engle Bible Studies".

Scott's Sunday Class

Current series: *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew about the Bible*

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel. Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.