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theme: The Apostles' Speech (Acts 2:14-41)

materials: Bibles, news story, words/music to "Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"

<http://www.higherpraise.com/lyrics/awesome/awesome5536.html>

welcome

Who in the group enjoys public speaking? If you do, why? If not, why not? What makes a good public speaker? Pick a random topic, and see if someone in the cell can give a 2-4 minute speech about it that keeps people's attention.

Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.

worship

Where have you seen God this week? Where have you experienced divine community this week? Sing "Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There is Freedom" together, and pray for one another, that you will be filled up with the power of God's Holy Spirit.

word

Read **Acts 2:14-41**

Why is it significant that it is Peter standing up and witnessing for Jesus?

How does Peter explain the behaviour of the apostles?

Peter says (quoting Joel 2) that "in the last days" the Spirit would be poured out on all people, and that this had just happened to them. But how could those have been the last days? Here we are 2000 years later. Was Peter wrong? If not, what did he mean?

Who *can* receive the Holy Spirit?

Does everyone receive the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

What does it mean that those who receive the Holy Spirit will prophesy?

Try to sum up what Peter says about Jesus in the rest of his speech.

What did Peter say one must do to be saved?

Why were so many people saved that day?

witness

Peter's speech was expertly communicated into the culture of the people he was addressing. It did not compromise truth, it was based in Scripture, and it spoke to the people who were in front of him, using passages of Hebrew Scripture they were deeply familiar with to explain the mysteries of Christ. (We see other examples of culturally intelligent witness in the book of Acts, such as when Paul addresses Greeks in Athens – **Acts 17:16-21**)



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Think of a person, or a grouping of people (perhaps a sub-culture, or a people-group) that you are familiar with who do not know the gospel. Share these names with the rest of the cell. Now, how can you communicate the truth of the gospel to these specific people or groups? What do you know about their culture and history that would be important to understand in order to communicate effectively with them? How does the message of the gospel intersect with where they are and what they have experienced? How can you speak into their culture without compromising truth? Have you ever really tried to figure that out, or are you witnessing the same to every person and group?

action points

Remind your cell that the giving of tithes and offerings helps maintain the ministry of the cell / Church / Corps, and that it also goes towards ministries like sponsoring children overseas.

Use the questions asked in the Witness section above to do some homework this week. Is there someone you know, or a people group you are familiar with, that you can do a better job of communicating the gospel to? Write out what you want to communicate to them, and how you would best do it, knowing who they are and something about their culture and history. Bring it to the cell next week, share it, pray about it, and then share the gospel with that person or representatives of that people group.

leader's guide

After the stunning and world-shaking events of Pentecost some explanations needed to be made. The apostles, just filled with the Holy Spirit, descended upon the streets below speaking in foreign tongues. Some who heard their own languages from Galilean lips were amazed and perplexed; others were sceptical and engaged in mockery. Who could decipher for everyone the seemingly miraculous thing that had just happened?

Up stepped Peter to the plate. Peter, the impetuous disciple who identified Jesus as Lord and Christ, who stepped out of the boat and walked on water to Jesus, who was the first to race to the empty tomb upon hearing the incredible reports; Peter, the cowardly disciple who could not accept the needful sacrifice of Jesus, who three times denied Jesus in order to save his own neck. This Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, stood up and did what he could not do on the day of Jesus' arrest: he witnessed for Christ.

This is the first of many long speeches recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. Fully 25% of Acts is devoted to speeches given by Peter, Paul, Stephen and James. It is clear that Luke was interested not just in what the apostles did, but in what they said as well. These speeches served to illuminate some of the early theology of the apostles, and the ways they attempted to communicate the gospel into a wide variety of contexts.

Peter's speech at Pentecost, (which is recorded only in summary, as we are told in verse 40 that he used many other words and exhortations), was masterful. He began by correcting a mistake: the apostles were not drunk, as it was far too early in the morning for them to have been drinking wine. Something else was going on, something for which the people of God had been waiting for a long, long time. Peter quoted from **Joel 2:28-32** in order to explain that what had happened to the apostles was the long-awaited pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God.

The original context of the passage in Joel is a severe plague of locusts upon Israel, which Joel interpreted as a warning of judgment from God. Calling on the name of the Lord for help, in the sense of turning back to the Lord in repentance, would result in Israel being delivered from the locusts and receiving good harvests again. But Joel also saw further, and announced the coming of a day when Israel would finally be delivered from all her enemies, when God's own Spirit would be poured out upon all his people, and when God's people could know that they are saved from the Day of Judgment. It was this that Peter was claiming had happened on the



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day of Pentecost.

The apostles understood this pouring out of the Spirit to represent the beginnings of the last days (in Peter's speech, when he quotes Joel he actually changes the word "afterwards" to the phrase "in the last days"). We don't know how long they expected this period of time to last, but there is no reason to believe it had to be a short time. The apostles believed that their task in this time was to bring the message of Jesus' gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. They had been told by Jesus before he ascended into heaven that they were not to worry about when or how the Kingdom would be fulfilled, but were instead to fulfill his commands. Peter's speech was the beginning of the Church's work in witnessing for Christ in the whole world, work that would (and will) occupy the Church between the pouring out of the Spirit and the return of Jesus.

The prophecy from Joel announced that the Spirit would be poured out upon all people, regardless of their outward status. Gender, race, class, age – none of these things would be a barrier to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in the last days. This does not mean that everybody *automatically* receives the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is vitally connected to the life, death, resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Those who call on the name of the Lord, identified by the apostles as Jesus, would be saved. Those who repent and are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sins will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit of God.

And those who received the Holy Spirit of God will prophesy. No longer was the Spirit contained to just prophets or kings, and no longer was the message of God reserved for priests working in the Temple. All would prophesy, in the sense that all who had the Spirit now had access to knowledge of God through Christ, and were able to speak this message into the world. This does not deny that there is a specific gift of prophecy that some have in order to edify the Church, as we see later on in the New Testament, just that the general message of God is not restricted to the few, but is the responsibility of the many.

Peter, having explained the presence of the Holy Spirit through Hebrew prophecy, then moved onto to explaining it through the person of Jesus. He talked about his life and ministry, how he was a man whom God was clearly with through his miracles, wonders and signs; he talked about his death, in which he was handed over to wicked men, but in which we also can see the plan and will of God the Father; he talked about his resurrection, how even though men put him to death, death could not hold him as the Father raised him to life, as was prophesied in **Psalm 16:8-11**; he talked about his exaltation, and how Jesus was now at the right hand of God, a position of greatest authority from which he poured out the Holy Spirit, and where God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ; and he talked about his salvation, that all those people who had been cut to the heart by Peter's message must repent and be baptized in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Peter exhorted them to leave the community of the sinful world, and to join the community of the people of God, the people of the Spirit. Three thousand did that day, and the message of the gospel was soon racing throughout Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world. It continues to this day.