



SENDTHEFIRE.CA

theme: Pentecost! (Acts 2:1-13)

materials: Bibles, news story, soap and water

welcome

Check how many different languages are spoken, at least in part, amongst your cell. Have you ever been in a place where you did not speak the language at all? What was that experience like? What languages are spoken in your community or city?

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?

Read out **Ezekiel 36:22-28**. This is a promise from the Lord to Israel that he would pour out his Spirit upon them. Many other such promises exist in the Hebrew Scriptures. In this passage God says his holiness will be shown through the cleansing of his people, who will receive a "new heart". Is your heart clean, or are you giving your heart to idols? Write down on a piece of paper anything that is threatening to be an idol in your life, and then put it in the middle of the circle. Burn these pieces of paper, if it is safe to do so where you are. Then pray for each other, asking for the Lord's forgiveness and for his holiness to be shown through you. As a symbol of this, wash each other's hands with soap and water.

word

Read **Acts 2:1-13**

What is Pentecost? What did it represent for the Jewish people?

Why does the Holy Spirit come as wind and fire? Can you think of any other times God is represented with wind and fire?

The apostles were "filled" with the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? Is it the same as being baptised in the Spirit?

Have you ever been filled with the Holy Spirit? What is that like?

Why did the apostles begin speaking in other languages? Has this ever happened to you?

Why did the onlookers think the apostles were drunk?

Why is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit so important for the Church?

Is the presence of the Holy Spirit important for your cell group? Do you talk about or acknowledge the Holy Spirit much?

witness



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Arrange another time this week for your cell group to gather and pray, specifically for the power and wisdom from the Holy Spirit to engage in witness, to speak the language of your community. Who does the Lord want you to reach out to, and how? Ask that you could be effective witnesses in your part of the world, and then go out with the power of God to do so. Consider also joining in with 24-7 Prayer across the world:

http://www1.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www_ihq_csld.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/0676BAFAB9B15C948025766D006F1F42?Opendocument

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.

If you don't know which languages are spoken in your community, find out this week. And start learning a few words in another community language so that you can begin interacting with people in your community in their own tongue. Eventually see if you can learn enough to speak with them about Jesus.

leader's guide

The Day of Pentecost has come to represent for Christians the day when God's Holy Spirit was poured out upon his people, his followers, the Church. But Pentecost itself already represented the relationship between Yahweh and his people long before the events described in Acts.

The day of Pentecost (taken from the Greek word for *fiftieth*) was observed fifty days after the Passover, and was connected to the Jewish Festival of Weeks, or Feast of Harvest (it was actually the middle point of three annual Jewish harvest festivals). It was celebrated as the time when the grain harvesting began, and the way it was to be celebrated is covered in **Deut 16:9-16, Lev 23:15-21, Ex 23:16**. It was also linked historically to the renewal of the covenant God made with Noah, and later with Moses.

By the time of Acts Pentecost had also potentially gained a new historical meaning. We know that by the second century Pentecost was a festival that remembered the giving of the Law to Israel at Mt Sinai. We cannot be totally sure that it had achieved this meaning by the time of Acts, but if it had it would make an interesting parallel with what is described in Acts 2.

On Mt Sinai Yahweh gave Israel the Law, and revealed himself through wind and fire (**Exodus 19:16-20**). There are many other times throughout Scripture when God uses this method to interact with his people. It is not perhaps the most accessible way to relate to his people, but the use of wind and fire makes clear the power and holiness of God. The word wind is certainly connected with the concept of Spirit; the Greek word *pneuma* can mean either wind or spirit, and the Spirit of God is likened to wind in other passages (**2 Samuel 22:16, Job 37:10, Ezekiel 13:13**). Fire is also a repeating theme for the presence of God in the Old Testament, and we see John the Baptist announce that the Spirit will cleanse and judge with fire in **Luke 3:16-17**.

So the Spirit comes down like wind and fire upon the room where the apostles are, and comes to rest on each of their heads, filling them with the Spirit of God. Sometimes this is described as "baptism with the Spirit". There is some confusion today around when people are *baptised* by the Holy Spirit, as opposed to being *filled* with the Holy Spirit. Both words are used in connection with Pentecost, and with other events of the Spirit. In **Acts 1:5** Jesus announced that the apostles were going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit, and when it happens the apostles are said to be filled with the Spirit. In **Acts 11:16** Peter references the prophecy of being baptised by the Spirit to explain what happened to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house, so it is clearly not just a one-time event for Pentecost. All throughout the book of Luke different people are described as being filled by the Spirit or full



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of the Spirit in order to perform certain tasks or speak truths. People who have already been filled with the Spirit are at times described as being filled again (notably the apostles in **Acts 4:31**). The Holy Spirit is also said to be “poured out” and “received”. So the concepts of being “baptised with the Spirit” and being “filled with the Spirit” are at times interchangeable. However, the word “baptised” is only ever used of a person’s *first* encounter with the Holy Spirit, and afterwards the word “filling” is used. So perhaps we should restrain our language in this way as well, describing a person’s initial encounter with the Holy Spirit as being “baptised in the Spirit”, while believing that we can all at later times be filled again by the Holy Spirit, particularly for power to undergo special works. And we should all desire to be constantly “full of” the Holy Spirit.

Once the disciples are baptised / filled with the Holy Spirit, they go out onto the street and begin speaking in other tongues. Some of those present thought the apostles were drunk, perhaps because they could not understand what was going on, perhaps because they were trying to make fun of them. It was not, however, because the apostles were out of control, or were speaking nonsense. Luke makes it clear that the apostles were miraculously speaking recognisable languages, not incoherently babbling. This is pretty important, because in Jerusalem at that time were Jewish people from all over the known world. Luke lists off the different nationalities, and says that all of them heard of the mighty works of God in their own languages. It is probable that many of these people would have spoken Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic anyways, but this miracle is showing that the message of the Gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was not going to be restricted to certain nationalities, nor to certain languages. The message, and the Church, was going to be universal in scope, was going to travel to every nation under heaven, and in its own language. Many commentators have drawn allusions from this story to the Tower of Babel, the story in **Genesis 11** where God confused all the languages of humans. Here that confusion is reversed.

So what does this all mean? What is the purpose of the Spirit being poured out, and why should that matter to the Church? Jesus had spent the time with his followers after his resurrection preparing them for the reception of this gift, so it is clearly of significant importance. And one way of understanding Pentecost is to see it as the great gift of Jesus to his people, the ongoing working out of salvation in them, the gift that forms them into his people, his Body on earth, and guarantees the work of sanctification in them. It is also the gift that equips and empowers the apostles for their task of witnessing for Jesus in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Without the promised Holy Spirit they could not accomplish this great work. And this gift would carry on throughout time, throughout the Church, so that it was not only the first apostles who could be filled by the Spirit, but every person who had received Christ as Lord and Saviour. The gift of the Holy Spirit therefore represents the new covenant established by Jesus with his people, wherein the Law of God is written upon the hearts of his people, as was prophesied in **Jer 31:33**. And this pouring out of the Spirit, the clear, immediate presence of God in the midst of the people, lead to the first “revival” of people being saved en masse. We still see the Holy Spirit drawing people to the Lordship of Christ today, sometimes in large numbers and over whole territories. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit is still available today, still filling his people today, still capable of bringing about signs and wonders and salvation.