

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

We're starting a new unit today. For the next several weeks we'll be sharing stories from the book of the Bible called Acts; or, to give it its full name, Acts of the Apostles. "Apostle" means someone who was sent out, so Jesus's friends and followers, who were known as "disciples"—learners—when they were with him were called apostles when they were sent out to do Jesus's work in the world. And they did some amazing things!

On Palm Sunday a couple weeks ago we heard about Jesus's last meal with his friends. As they sat together, he told them how he was going to be leaving them soon—we know that he meant he was going to die. Talking about God's plan for his life and for the world, he gave them two promises. He told them that he would ask God to send them a helper, the Holy Spirit. And he let them know that, because of his own connection with God, anyone who believed in him would be able to perform the same kinds of miracles he could do himself—or even greater ones!

Then he was killed, and then rose from the dead. Over the next month and a half he appeared to his followers a bunch of different times and taught them about God's kingdom. He reminded them of his Holy Spirit promise and told them not to leave Jerusalem until it came true: "Just like John baptized people in water," he said, "you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit... and soon!"

One day he was with his friends walking on a hillside and they were asking him what would come next. "Will you bring God's kingdom to earth?" they wanted to know. "When will that happen?"

"You don't get to know the schedule." Jesus told them. "The schedule is God's. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And then once the Holy Spirit fills you you'll be my messengers in Jerusalem, to the rest of Judea, and all over the world!" That was the last thing Jesus said to them. As they watched, he was taken up into the sky and disappeared into a cloud.

As they stood there gawping in amazement two men in white robes appeared by them. "Hey you all," one of the men said. "Why are you standing around looking up into the sky? You've got things to do and places to be! Jesus, who just went up into heaven, will come back just as mysteriously as he left." So they left the hill and went back to the place they were staying in Jerusalem, and waited.

About a week later they were gathered together to celebrate the holiday of Shavuot, which remembers the time God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. It's an important holiday, so Jewish people from all over were gathered in Jerusalem to observe it—including Jesus's friends from Galilee.

As they talked and ate together, they suddenly heard a sound like the roaring of a windstorm. It filled up the house where they were sitting, then little flames appeared and settled on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and found themselves speaking in other languages, all at once. People in the street outside heard the commotion and came to look. Some of them were amazed—people from all different countries all found that they could understand what the believers were saying, in their own language! But other people just heard the noise, and declared, "They must be drunk!"

Then Peter and the other apostles came out to talk to the crowd. "Listen up all of you!" Peter called over the commotion. "None of these people are drunk: it's just 9:00 in the morning, much too early for that! No, this is

flip over for more!

God's power in the world, just like the prophets predicted!" Peter went on to tell the listening crowd all about Jesus—how he did miracles, how people killed him, and how he rose from the dead. He wanted them all to know that God made Jesus to be Lord and Savior.

Lots of the people listening were convinced by what Peter said. "But what should we do now?" they asked him and the other apostles. So Peter told them.

"Each of you should turn away from the bad things you've done, and turn to God. Then you can be baptized in the name of Jesus, and you'll receive the Holy Spirit yourself. That's God's promise to you and your children, and even to the Gentiles!" 3,000 people believed Peter and were baptized that day.

Wondering Questions

I wonder if it was hard for Jesus's friends when he left them for a second time, and so suddenly?

I wonder if they felt confident they'd be able to be messengers for God?

I wonder why when the Holy Spirit came the first thing it did was let the apostles speak other languages?