

HOLY SPIRIT CONNECTION

The last few weeks we've been talking about spiritual practices—things we can do to help us feel connected with God, with ourselves, and with people around us. As we try those practices, as we pray and meditate and move our bodies, we can call on the Holy Spirit to surround us and come into us, bringing us close to God. And today is a special day for the Holy Spirit: it's the holiday of Pentecost, where we remember how Jesus's friends became the first people to experience the Spirit, which Jesus had promised to them before he left them to go up into heaven.

I bet it was hard for the disciples to say goodbye to Jesus. As he had told them just a little while before, by knowing him they knew God! Now he was gone; would they have to go back to only connecting with God through worshipping at the Temple and following the religious laws, the way they had before they had met him?

But Jesus had made them that promise and told them to wait in Jerusalem until it came true. About a week after Jesus left them they were together to celebrate the holiday of Shavuot, which comes 50 days after Passover. Shavuot is a celebration of the wheat harvest, and it's also a commemoration of the time God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, so it's an important holiday. Jewish people from all over—not only Israel but Africa, Asia, Greece, and Rome—were gathered in Jerusalem to observe it. Plus a small group from Galilee.

As Jesus's friends talked and ate together, suddenly they heard a sound like roaring wind. It filled up the house where they were sitting, then little flames appeared and settled on each of them. The Holy Spirit rushed into them, and they 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 over, who spoke all different languages, found that they could understand what the believers were saying! But other people just heard the noise, and declared, "Those people must be drunk!"

Then Peter and his friends came out to talk to the crowd. "Listen up, all of you!" Peter called over the commotion. "None of us here are drunk: it's only 9:00 in the morning! No, what you're seeing here is something new: God's spirit come down to earth for all of us! Just like the prophets said would happen."

I don't think the timing is a coincidence! Just like the rules God told Moses gave God's people a way of connecting with God for themselves rather than relying on Moses to do it for them, the Holy Spirit let people connect with God more directly than they could by just following the rules. As Peter told the crowd all about Jesus he let them know that they too could receive the Holy Spirit if they wanted; and 3,000 people were excited enough by that message that they were baptized that very day.

Over the weeks and months following that first Pentecost, the Spirit was strongly with Peter and the other disciples, and they found that it changed how they lived. From being afraid of the Romans, who had killed Jesus, they became so brave they kept telling people about Jesus even when judges and soldiers told them stop. They were drawn into radical generosity, sharing everything they had with people who needed it. And they were able to do the same sort of miracles that Jesus himself had done. Even though Jesus was gone, their connection with God was stronger than ever.

flip over for more!

Wondering Questions

I wonder if the coming of the Holy Spirit was scary for any of the disciples?

I wonder why the Holy Spirit looked like fire on the disciples' heads?

I wonder why the first thing they were able to do was speak other languages?

I wonder what it's like for us to experience the Holy Spirit today?