

Daily Readings

Please note: This week we continue our study of the book of Acts. Read and reread each passage to get a sense of the total dependence these early followers gave to the Holy Spirit.

Monday, June 1 – Read Acts 12:1-11. This passage includes a significant shift in the resistance to the early church. James is executed, and Peter is arrested and put in chains. Peter is kept under heavy guard awaiting a trial. The assumption with the death of James is that Peter, too, will be martyred. An angel of the Lord appears and rescues Peter, reminding the early followers that no matter how strong the opposition to the Word of God – no matter how out numbered we may be – God will prevail. Can you remember times in your life when you felt challenged in your faith? How did you respond? Do you feel outnumbered right now? Call on God, and see what God can do.

Tuesday, June 2 – Read Acts 12:12-19. This short passage covers a very exciting narrative. Peter has miraculously escaped an armed guard. He now goes to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the writer of the second gospel. The servant Rhonda answers his knocking, but the other followers could not believe it was Peter. When Peter is finally allowed entrance, he gives all the glory to God. Give glory to God for something in your life – family, work, house, security, friends, church...

Wednesday, June 3 – Read Acts 12:20-25. The second part of Acts ends with this passage. While Herod is doing all that he can to stop the early church, they continue to grow. Herod has all the power, authority and strength, but God continues to bless the disciples. As Herod is addressing a large gathering – **“an angel of the Lord stuck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”** This is an amazing graphic story of how in some cases the power of God deals with the church’s enemies. In spite of the Jews and Roman Empire, Acts tells us that **“the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents.”** Can you name those institutions in our culture that continue to oppose the church? How do you believe God will eventually deal with them?

Thursday, June 4 – Acts 13:1-12. With chapter 13, Luke begins a series of stories about the spread of the early church. Luke is also beginning to shift his emphasis from the ministry of Peter to the ministry of Paul. Like Peter, we see the power of God on the side of Paul, blessing and clearing the way for his ministry. How do you see the power of God working in the church today?

Friday, June 5 – Read Acts 13:13-52. In these passages, Luke gives us a portrait of how the ministry and evangelism of Paul worked as he moved from town to town. He would go first to the synagogue. As a Jew, Paul had knowledge of Judaism, and could speak directly to their faith. Once he got their attention, Paul shifted his attention to the salvation of Jesus. We read in chapter 13 how the Jews were converted. Then Paul would get them to open themselves to the salvation of the gentiles. Thus, a church would be born. We also see the potential for conflict as many became jealous of the attention Paul was getting and his openness to the gentiles. In verses 48-51, Paul and Barnabas were driven out by this persecution. But notice the words of verse 51, **“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”** What resistance do you see to the growth of God work in this community? Do you see jealousy or suspicion? How do you see the followers of Christ “filled with joy” despite such resistance?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, May 31, 2009 — Pentecost

Theology of Twitter (Week 3 of 3)

Staying Connected

Acts 2:1-13

The Word from the Bible (Today's New International Version)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

What is Pentecost?

The Church’s recognition of Pentecost was not originally a Christian observance. On the 50th day after Passover, Ancient Jews celebrated the day as a spring harvest festival. In the Spring, Canaanites would celebrate the spring harvest. The Hebrews changed this harvest celebration to a time to remember the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. But many of the old harvest celebrations remained as part of the celebration. The festival was one considered so important that all Jewish men within traveling distance were supposed to worship in Jerusalem at the temple.

Pentecost was a festival of new bread and new wine. This festival was immensely popular and very well attended because of the party atmosphere that went with it. In the Jewish tradition, Pentecost was the only day that a faithful Jew was allowed to drink to excess. In fact, some rabbis of the period taught that all of the Jewish men had to drink to the point of intoxication on this day as a sign of their gratitude to God for the gift of the fruit of the vine.

Our lesson from Acts, chapter 2, recalls the first Pentecost after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Just before the ascension, Jesus had instructed his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait. For about 10 days, the disciples had been waiting and praying.

Up to this point, scripture portrays the disciples as pretty much clueless... bumbling fellows who never seem to understand the Lord's teachings. The apostles do not seem to understand much at all. To their credit, they knew enough to do what they had been told — go to Jerusalem and wait.

Pentecost began at daybreak with the sound of the ram's horn being blown and a priest standing on the city wall waving a loaf of bread in each hand. The city was full of the sounds of laughter and celebration, and everywhere you could see the reunions of old friends and families meeting for the festival.

The book of Acts tells us that Jerusalem was filled with Jews from several nations who had gathered there to celebrate Pentecost. The room where the disciples were gathered was filled with the sound of a mighty wind. The Bible is not specific about the location of this room, though many believe they were gathered at the Temple. Acts tells us that tongues of flame danced over their heads. Wind and fire were ancient signs of the presence of God. This was the coming of the Holy Spirit among them that Jesus had promised. In their excitement, they all began to speak at once, creating a cacophony of sound. In spite of the limited education of Jesus' disciples, everyone heard the disciples share in their own language "God's deeds of power."

We call Pentecost the birthday of the church because this was the first public gathering of the followers of Jesus. Peter shared the first sermon, and 3,000 were converted and baptized. From this day "the Church" began to grow and multiply.

It's the Who that really matters

If someone in the church is hurting and no one knows, does it matter? Of course it does.

The early church took community seriously. They spent time together, ate together, shared with each other, sacrificed for each other and cared for each other. Everyone was connected. Our society is moving faster and faster. The church of the 21st century will need to use every means at its disposal to make sure that each member of our fellowship knows they are important.

Our churches today can have an anonymous feel. But God made each of us with the need for human relationships and community. Every pastor understands this and is constantly striving to build community within the congregation through Bible studies and other types of small groups.

As our church continues to grow, we need to remember that people matter to God therefore they should matter to us. We are, permanently, a community – family. We are called to look out for each other.

Paul said: ***Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*** (Galatians 6:3)

Paul also said: ***Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others.*** (Philippians 2:3-4)

Jesus said, ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you..."*** (John 13:34)

Jesus continues, ***"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*** (John 13:35)

The early church spent time together. They worshiped together. They went from house to house breaking bread together and sharing meals with one another. Their attitude was, "Your needs are more important than my wants. I'll sacrifice my extras if it will provide you with some of the basics."

The When matters, too!

We live in a real-time culture. When we look at the book of Acts and the early events of the church's life, we see a real-time church. Church was not just a one-hour-a-week, occasional thing for the early Christians. It was a constant, continuous, day-by-day experience.

Great churches are real-time and moving at the speed of life. These churches are involved in life-giving ministries that are infused with the presence of God every day. ***And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*** (Acts 5:42)

What does this mean, and why is it important to the Church?

Two major functions of online social networks (such as Twitter and Facebook) are like the church and can be used by the church.

1) These online communities connect people. While at first some of the posts seem narcissistic, the primary function is to bring people together into relationship. There are thousands of stories of how friends have found each other after years of being apart. In the 21st century complex culture in which we live, maintaining relationship is a challenge. Keeping community is even harder. The church should also stay connected throughout the challenges of this culture. The difference is that the church offers a much deeper and meaningful relationship to its body. We can use these social networks to be what God has called us to be.

2) Because these social networks use real-time technology, the exchange of information is easy and fast. The church is challenged by our once- or twice-a-week contact. No longer do we live in rural agricultural communities where everyone tends to share everything. Our lives are spread all over the world. We share little. As the church of Jesus Christ, we need to regain the sense of sharing our lives together (not just an hour or two a week). Social internet networking can help us stay in touch and connect.

Make no mistake, these networks are not a replacement, but they can be a tool. They show us we can stay connected real time. The can now move more at the speed of life. We can better be the people God is calling us to be – "those who love one another."

Notes
