Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Day of Pentecost


Gathering
Welcome

Pentecost means 50th day. On the 50th day after Passover, Jews celebrated with a festival. For Christians, Pentecost marks the 50th and final day of the Easter season. At Pentecost the Spirit moves among the disciples and crowds of onlookers. It is on Pentecost that the disciples begin their Spirit-filled ministry. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit often is depicted as flames or a dove descending on the people.

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

Gracious and loving God,

We have come to you today to be fed by your Spirit.

We have come to recognize that you are a God of:

Love—accepting us as we are;

Forgiveness—forgiving our shortcomings;

Mercy—carrying us when we can go no further.

And when we can go no further, we pray for:

Peace in our busy lives;

Understanding in our confusion;

Clarity when our eyes are dim to your abundant grace;

Strength to meet the challenges in life;

Comfort when we feel alone and healing of our spirit.
God, bless this community with peace. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

—Dick Hansen

Spiritual Practice
Breath Prayer

Read the following to the group:
Our spiritual practice today is a breath prayer. During the prayer we will use a word to breathe in and a word to breathe out. As you breathe in, name something you would like to receive. As you exhale, state something you would like to release. (For example: Breathe in peace, exhale fear).

For the breath prayer, you will sit with relaxed posture and close your eyes. We will spend five minutes in this practice. Take a moment to think of the word that names something you want to receive. (Pause in silence 15 seconds.) Now think of the word that states something you want to release. (Pause in silence 15 seconds.)

Lead the practice with these instructions:
Sit in a relaxed posture. If you are comfortable, close your eyes.
Become aware of your breath. Notice its regular, natural rhythm.
As you breathe, begin to focus on what you are inhaling and what you are exhaling.
Monitor the time. Occasionally give instructions, “Breathe in…receive. Breathe out…release.”

After five minutes share the following instructions:
Close your breath prayer by offering a silent prayer of thanks to God. When you are ready, take a deep breath and open your eyes.

Sharing Around the Table

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

...When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and
Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

At Pentecost, the Spirit that descended on Jesus now descends on the disciples. Just as Jesus began his ministry filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples are beginning their ministry empowered by the Spirit.

The Jewish festival of Pentecost is a celebration of giving the Law on Mount Sinai. That encounter with God included dramatic signs—thunder, lightning, smoke, and fire. The writer of Acts uses similar imagery as the Spirit descends on the formation of the church.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the words breath, wind, and spirit are all the same word. Fire was understood to purify or cleanse. The writer of Acts describes the Spirit descending on the gathered crowd at Pentecost as wind and flame. The Spirit purifies, cleanses, and breathes life into the formation of the church.

The people of Israel had hoped the Messiah would bring together Jews from all nations. This passage connects Jewish expectation with God’s vision for an inclusive community that includes all nations. For the gospel to go to the entire world, to every ethnic group, culture, and tribe, it needs to be taught in all languages or tongues.

Some people have understood this Pentecostal passage to describe the charismatic spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. But the miracle of this story is that everyone could understand what the disciples were saying in their own language. The gift of the Spirit made the gospel message accessible to all people. This gift continues today as people are led by the Spirit to learn languages and share the message and ministry of Jesus around the world.
Questions

1. When have you felt the Holy Spirit breathe new life into you?
2. What imagery would you use to describe your experiences with the Holy Spirit?
3. Through the presence of the Spirit, all the people could hear and understand. When has the presence of the Spirit brought new understanding to your life?

Sending

Generosity Statement

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing, small-group ministries as part of your generous response. This offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of passion and purpose, May your Spirit guide our decisions as we make Responsible Choices with our resources. May we be wise in spending, prudent in saving, and generous in sharing, that your purposes of healing, wholeness, and well-being might be extended to all. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 42, “As the Wind Song through the Trees”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Communion Statement

Choose one scripture to read from this selection: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39.

Invitation to Communion

All are welcome at Christ’s table. The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament in which we remember the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ, we also experience Communion as an opportunity to renew our baptismal covenant and to be formed as disciples who live Christ’s mission. Others may have different or added understandings within their faith traditions. We invite all who participate in the Lord’s Supper to do so in the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

On this day of Pentecost we celebrate the Holy Spirit’s presence with us in full. As we share Communion we experience new life through blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 532, “We Meet as Friends at Table.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: picture of a dove, a lit candle (electric can be substituted), a blanket

God has promised that God’s Spirit always will be with us. We call this the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we learn about God’s Spirit. Lots of words have described the Holy Spirit.

Dove (show picture)—How might the Holy Spirit be like a dove? Listen to what the children share, and then say: When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit flew down like a dove and landed on Jesus.

Flame (light or turn on the candle)—How might the Spirit be like a flame? Give the children time to share their ideas, and then say: It flickered like a flame and touched everyone.

Comforter (let the children touch the blanket or wrap themselves in it)—How might the Spirit be like a comforter? Affirm any responses from the children, and then say: We feel as if we are wrapped in God’s love when we feel the Spirit with us.

Breath/wind (breathe out)—How is the Spirit like breath or wind? Give the children time to think of their answers, and then say: Sometimes the Spirit is like a mighty wind, and sometimes it is as quiet as Jesus breathing the Spirit upon the disciples. We can hear the Spirit in our breath, too. Cup your hands over your mouth and breathe into your hands. Listen…Can you hear the Spirit?

God promises the Holy Spirit always will be with us. Listen and watch for the Spirit in your life.