

INSPIRED FOR NEW LIFE

As we step into the Book of Acts, we need to give some attention to the context of this letter Luke wrote to his friend, Theophilus. Acts is actually the second half of a two-volume correspondence. First Luke wrote to his friend an orderly account so Theophilus could be certain of the things he had heard about Jesus, that He wasn't too good to be true, that He was the Son of God.

Luke followed his gospel with the Book of Acts, a story of God's inspired people, apostles and disciples, men and women, Jews and Gentiles filled by the Spirit of God for new life together.

Luke's sequel to the good news about Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection begins with the Son of God gathering His disciples and promising a gift. Jesus wrote to assure them of two things:

- 1) they would receive power, and
- 2) they would be his witnesses.

Then, Jesus ascended into Heaven, and two angels appeared with a leading question: Why do you stand here looking into the sky?

More than a question, that was a statement.

From this point forward these disciples will be more commonly referred to as apostles. More than students of the Son, they'll live as those sent by the Son.

The apostles (sent ones) returned to the city and prayed continually as a family. To fill Judas's empty spot as 1 of the 12, they prayed for discernment, then selected Matthias.

Then, came Pentecost Sunday (50 days from the resurrection)

A day the Jewish people celebrated God's gift of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

But God marked this Pentecost with an even greater gift, the Holy Spirit

Gathered in the upper room, a sound like a violent wind, flaming tongues, different languages...

Echoes of the confusion that broke out at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11

But this time, the Spirit gives clarity and understanding.

The implication? The Spirit is present to bring revelation, as a blessing for every nation

God poured His Spirit out on those gathered in the upper room, and they appeared to be drunk.

Peter stood up to set the record straight and delivered the first Sunday sermon.

He presented to the crowd Jesus, the Son of God, crucified at their request but resurrected by God's power, according to His will.

Cut to the heart, they asked a critical question: Brothers, what shall we do?

Peter answered: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The church was born as 3,000 answered the call, baptized that very day.

Then Luke gave us a snapshot of this new collection of people in Acts 2:42-47, both descriptive and prescriptive. They are devoted to:

1) the apostles' teaching, 2) fellowship, 3) the breaking of bread, and 4) prayer

Just like Jesus, they go on living with power and authority, marked by a radical generosity and hospitality. They live as a people inspired for new life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As a group, there's so much to wrestle with here. Let's start with a really open-ended question: What do you think it would have been like to be a part of this moment in human history?

Why do you think one letter to Theophilus about Jesus's life and ministry just wasn't enough for Luke?

Looking at Jesus's last words to his disciples, his promise of the Holy Spirit seems connected to a strategic vision for the future. According to Jesus, why was He sending the Spirit?

When the Holy Spirit showed up in the Upper Room, what did He inspire those gathered there to do, and how does that confirm what Jesus said about His purpose in coming?

After the Spirit empowers Peter to deliver a message that brings 3,000 people to faith, the church gets busy living with a purpose. Luke pointed to four characteristics of this new community. They devoted themselves to:

1. The apostles' teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of bread
4. Prayer

Does that sound like the good life? Why?

Does that sound like your life? Why or why not?

These commitments produced something unique. By the power of the Holy Spirit and a new devotion to these things, this new community was marked by generosity, joy and sincerity.

Does that sound like the kind of community you want to belong to?

What's keeping us from this reality?

Pray by God's help that your group might come to know a new and inspired life together by the power of the Holy Spirit and an earnest commitment to these things.