



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost (A)
May 31, 2020

RCL: Acts 2:1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39

Acts 2:1-21

The Holy Spirit is witness to God still working in our world. The Holy Spirit helps guide, empower, and sustain God's mission in our lives and our church. This spirit opens the possibility of doing things we never imagined before, as the disciples experience when they understand those speaking in their native tongues. This encounter with the Spirit brought wonder, some confusion, and confirmation of how they were being called by God. A people of different languages, backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities, all called in their own ways to proclaim God in their lives.

This idea of new possibilities through the Spirit is still being understood, reconciled, and transformed today. While there may not be a big rumble in the clouds every time the Spirit is present, the Spirit is still at work. When discerning how the Spirit may be moving you or your church, call on the Spirit and acknowledge that God is present in our current and future work. This acknowledgment of God's presence can take some pressure off of ourselves and leave room for the Spirit to work. In other words, we still have to do our part, but we are not alone, and God is in the midst of it all. Just like we are being called, so are others. The bigger reflection then becomes: how do we support our brothers and sisters as we all witness the new possibilities of God calling us through the Holy Spirit?

- How do you witness the Holy Spirit working in your life and the life of the Church?
- What holds us back from acknowledging that God is working in the lives of others, especially those who speak a different language or live across the world?
- How can the gift of the Spirit inspire us as we live in the Anglican Communion and wider Church?

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

It is hard to pay attention to God working in the world when we are surrounded by pain and suffering. As I write this, the world is currently facing a pandemic that is dim and scary. A feeling of "there is no God working in the world right now," seems more appropriate. However, as we move through the words of Psalm 104, there is a sense of relief that fills me. It is one of those psalms that can take you to a place of peace.

Imagine floating in the ocean on a warm day. The water is still, warmth covers the body, the pressures of the world begin to disappear, you hear the birds in the sky and the noise of laughter from kids playing, and the water is gently moving you back and forth. This place of peace can be hard to find when the chaos of life is constantly interrupting it.

Psalms 104 gives us a few examples of where we can go to be reminded of this peace. Though we may not understand why something bad is happening, God is still working in this peace; God is working in both the grief and the joys of life. It is okay if we do not always see the good. It is okay if it doesn't always make sense. It's okay if we cannot always see God in a situation. It is okay to be upset. God still meets us in this place.

- What is your peaceful place when the world around you becomes too overwhelming?
- How does God meet you in this place?

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

As a world, we are always on the go. There is a saying that time stops for no one. To compensate, we balance the busy with the idea of self-care. We are fed by statements like, "Do what you have to do to get to the top," "self-made," "time to focus on *me*," or "all work no play." While focus and determination are not bad things, sometimes these ideas can bring us to a place of tiredness, loneliness, and unhappiness; we are drained of things that are physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually life-giving and healthy. Our gifts are many, but when we lose sight of staying connected to others, maintaining healthy relationships, taking care of ourselves and others, we lose sight of the concept that we are one body and join in one spirit.

Have you ever been in that unhappy place? Are you currently in it? This is not to criticize if you have or are; rather, it is an invitation to further reflection, because it impacts us all at some point. This idea of one body and one spirit can remind us that in a busy world, influenced by individualism, in that individualism and busyness, there is room for God, for love, for yourself, and for your neighbors.

- What are the barriers that keep you from sharing your gifts with others or allowing others to share their gifts with you?
- In a busy, individualized world, what can you or the Church do to remind us that we are one body and join in one spirit?

John 20:19-23

Jesus appears to his fearful disciples and gives them his peace and the Spirit. This encounter with the disciples does not have the same easiness of belief as the encounter with doubting Thomas, which comes right afterward. For Thomas, it was hard to believe Jesus appeared to them until he saw it for himself. These two encounters speak to having faith.

Sometimes in our lives, it is easier to know that Christ is present with us. There are also times when it feels like Christ has abandoned us. This is not meant to compare Thomas and the other disciples, but to bring to light the different ways we might encounter Jesus in our lives. Additionally, this is not to compare one situation of faith to another or one person of faith to another. Eventually, Thomas did recognize Jesus, and through this, he saw that a bigger part of this call is accepting that we will not always recognize the Lord. Still, he *did* recognize that he already knew the teachings of Jesus on love, forgiveness, and preaching the Good News; and he did not need to fully see Jesus to keep these teachings in his life and ministry.

We may not always see Jesus in our lives, but we already have some idea of how Jesus is calling us to act, react, and respond to life's situations. We all can still participate in these teachings in our lives and the world, even if – in the moment – it is difficult to feel Jesus' presence. Love, forgiveness, peace, and caring for others still goes a long way.

- Can you think of a time you felt Jesus' presence in your life and a time when you did not? How did you end up recognizing Jesus in these situations?

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