

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-13)

FAITH STORY:

Acts 2:1-13

FAITH FOCUS:

When followers of Jesus gathered for Pentecost (also known as Festival of the Weeks), they were in for a huge surprise. Divided tongues that looked like fire rested upon each one of them, and they began speaking in languages that were not their own. Jews from every nation who were living in Jerusalem heard the Galileans talking in their own native language, and wondered how in the world that could be happening. Some seemed ready to attribute the miracle to a Higher Power, while others thought it was just a case of too much powerful wine.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students think about the mystery and the power of the Holy Spirit.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Learn about the coming of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost.
- Think about where the Holy Spirit has been and could be a part of their lives.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Portable fan
- 2 Red and yellow streamers—enough for two per person
- 3 Masking tape or another way to hang the streamers
- 4 Bibles for all students
- 5 A birthday cake with candles
- 6 Plates and forks
- 7 Approximately one foot of newsprint per student. You don't need to cut it into one-foot pieces—just have a long strip with that many total feet.
- 8 Colorful markers or paints

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5 minutes)

Hand out streamers to students when they arrive and have them hang them up. (You may want to suggest how and where they hang them.)

When all of the streamers are hanging, turn on the portable fan in the direction of the streamers.

Ask: *What is making the streamers move? (The wind created by the fan.) How do you know it's the wind? Can you see it? (No.) Then how do you know it exists? (Because you can see what it does—you can see its effect on something else.)*

CONNECT: (5–7 minutes)

Ask students to take turns sitting in front of the fan. When everyone has done that, **ask:** *How many of you SAW the air coming at you? (None.)*

Then how do you know the fan was blowing air on you? (You FELT it.)

Transition statement: *I'm going to give you some hints about today's topic and let's see if you can figure out what it is:*

Hint #1: It's something that Christians believe in but haven't seen.

(Most students will probably say God, which is a correct answer, but not the one you're looking for.)

Hint #2: The eleven disciples saw something above their heads in connection with this.

Hint #3: The disciples started talking in other languages when they got this.

Answer: The Holy Spirit.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–15 minutes)

Hand out Bibles and ask students to turn to Acts 2:1-13. Read the passage.

Share a mini-lecture with students based on the points made in Insights from Scripture.

Invite students to gather around the newsprint that you have either taped to the wall or spread out on the floor. Ask them to paint or draw a mural on the newsprint that depicts how the disciples felt when the Holy Spirit showed up in their room and their lives. The key word is to think about their FEELINGS rather than what it might have looked like, so the mural will be abstract.

APPLY: (5–10 minutes)

When the mural is completed, invite students to stand back and study it for a few minutes. As they study it, ask them to find a section of the mural that symbolizes how they have felt, or would like to feel, the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives. Invite those who wish to share to do so. Lead by example.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to sit in a circle and spend some moments in prayer, talking to God about their desire to feel the Spirit, thanking God for the times when they have felt the Spirit's presence.

After a few moments of quiet time, take the streamers you haven't used yet and go around the circle, handing each student a streamer. Keep one for yourself and ask students to follow your example as you lead them in this closing blessing:

Holding the streamer, put your arms over your head as you say:

Holy Spirit, come into our lives.

(repeat)

Hold each end of the streamer, stretch arms out so streamer is behind your back, then fold arms on your chest so streamer is around you.

Embrace us with your presence.

(repeat)

Hold streamer and hang it down from arm at shoulder height.

Walk with us from this place.

(repeat)

Wave streamer around.

And give us the courage to be the presence of Jesus to others.

(repeat)

Amen!

Encourage students to take their streamers with them as a reminder this week of the Holy Spirit. You may want to ask them to bring the streamers back next week and talk about how they felt the Spirit in their lives during the week.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

The disciples were gathered for Pentecost—one of three Jewish festivals at which all males were supposed to gather. The word Pentecost, however, took on a whole new meaning when a rush of wind invaded the place where they were gathered, tongues of fire rested above each disciple, and they began to talk in other languages. The wind and the tongues of fire represented the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of the disciples—just as Jesus had promised would happen. The languages the disciples were suddenly able to speak were those of the Jews in Jerusalem from other nations—thus enabling those Jews to hear the good news about God's deeds of power through Jesus. Pentecost then became much more than a Jewish festival—it became the birthday of the Christian church. From that day forward, the disciples went out to preach the word and perform miracles to attest to the truth of what they were proclaiming.

The gift of speaking in other tongues that the disciples received that day consisted of

languages that people from other nations could understand. Another aspect of speaking in tongues was an unintelligible language that Paul addressed in I Corinthians 12 and 14. This language could not be understood without interpretation, and was given for the purpose of worship, praise, thanksgiving and prayer.

While we as Mennonites today strongly believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we have not generally participated in the more charismatic aspects of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues. Our beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit as found in the Confession of faith are below:

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995

Article 3. Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of God, who dwelled in Jesus Christ, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of our redemption and of the redemption of creation.

Through the Spirit of God, the world was created, prophets and writers of Scripture were inspired, the people were enabled to follow God's law, Mary conceived, and Jesus was anointed at his baptism. [1] By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the reign of God, healed the sick, accepted death on the cross, and was raised from the dead.

At Pentecost, God began to pour out the Spirit on all flesh and to gather the church from among many nations. [2] As a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the church praises and worships God and brings forth the fruit of the Spirit. By the gifts of the Holy Spirit, all Christians are called to carry out their particular ministries. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church comes to unity in doctrine and action. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church preaches, teaches, testifies, heals, loves, and suffers, following the example of Jesus its Lord.

The Holy Spirit calls people to repentance, convicts them of sin, and leads into the way of righteousness all those who open themselves to the working of the Spirit.[3] Scripture urges us to yield to the Spirit, and not to resist or quench the Spirit. [4] By water and the Spirit, we are born anew into the family of God. The Spirit dwells in each child of God, bringing us into relationship with God. Through the indwelling of the Spirit, we are made heirs together with Christ, if we suffer with him, so that we may also be glorified with him. [5] The Spirit teaches us, reminds us of Jesus' word, guides us into all truth, and empowers us to speak the word of God with boldness. [6]

The Holy Spirit enables our life in Christian community, comforts us in suffering, is present with us in time of persecution, intercedes for us in our weakness, guarantees the redemption of our bodies, and assures the future redemption of creation.

(1) Ps. 104:30; Mic. 3:8; Ezek. 36:26-27; Luke 1:35; 3:22.

(2) Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18.

(3) John 16:8-10.

(4) Isa. 63:10; Acts 5:3; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19.

(5) John 3:5; Rom. 8:14-17.

(6) John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:14; Acts 4:24-31.

(7) Matt. 10:20; 2 Cor. 5:5; Rom. 8:26-27; Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:18-23.