

Acts 2:1-4

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability (NRSV).

Acts is the story of what happens after Jesus leaves. The disciples gathered on the Mount of Olives and watched Jesus ascend into heaven. Jesus gave final instructions to the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. So, the coming of the Holy Spirit is anticipated. At the end of the Gospel of Luke Jesus said “stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Then at the beginning of Acts “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5).

The Jewish festival Shavuot occurred 50 days from Passover. The Hellenistic term *Pentecost* is a Greek word for 50th. Pentecost occurs seven weeks after Jesus’ resurrection. This Christian holiday is a result of the resurrection. Our Scripture takes place on the day of Pentecost.

The location is one place. Some scholars believe that the location is the Upper Room, or an upper room. This interpretation comes from Acts 1:13 they went to the room upstairs where they were staying (NRSV). Acts does not go on to say that they left, went somewhere else, or stayed there. The exact location is insignificant. What is important is unity. They were all together. Luke emphasizes unity and often refers to believers as being all together in one community. The dramatic details are often emphasized in sermons on Pentecost due to the excitement of imagery – the rush of a violent wind and divided tongues of fire. However, the most important thing during this particular Pentecost is the appearance of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is one of the main themes of Acts. It is not a matter of humans working out a concept of the spirit; it is the Spirit working upon the life of humans. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a divine presence from heaven. The significance is that the divine Spirit fills the people with courage to teach the lessons of Jesus everywhere, even in Jerusalem where Jesus was executed. Suddenly the people were gifted with new vitality. The followers of Jesus praised God with loud voices. They were unusually fearless. They stood up and said what they needed to say even if the words meant death. Peter stepped forward and announced with exuberance that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy of Joel “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28). Peter’s interpretation is straightforward. The risen Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to descend upon those that repent and are baptized. Peter’s speech is an event in itself and triggers reactions and results. He was amazingly effective. The people listened. They were moved by him and amazed at the wondrous works of God. Thousands of Jews came to Jerusalem for the religious festival and are converted in a single day as they embraced the teaching. However, as a consequence the new community grew rapidly and the sufficient number attracted unwanted attention from the religious leaders that had to deal with a renewed group of followers that were growing in spite of killing their founder. As the Jewish

leaders retaliate by arresting many and executing some, the Christians flee Jerusalem and take the message to the world.

From its very inception, the church is a missionary organization. When the leaders told their personal stories of their experience with Jesus, the hearts of listeners were filled with the Holy Spirit. We live in a world where forces divide and threaten to destroy us. Nations are divided over power politics and global economics. Groups within nations are divided by class, rival politics. Our only hope is a stronger force. People are drawn together in unity at Pentecost. Unity empowers the people to resist the forces that destroy them. Christians are drawn together by a common devotion – a love for Jesus. The love of Christ draws people together and we Christians are united with others globally. We are not united by liturgies, management styles, or tradition. We are drawn together by God, Jesus, and love. Christianity offers the strongest potential for unity. Everything we have comes from God, belongs to God, and is to be shared with members of God's family.