

THE WORKINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 1 - The Workings of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts

Recently I've seen a number of articles about "re-opening" a church (i.e., a congregation's activity schedule and physical facilities) after the Pandemic. In particular, I've seen

- The Michigan District model, which uses the example of Nehemiah as a template of questions to consider for the "return from digital exile"
- The LCEF model, which talks of developing / rediscovering a Mission Vision, considering Connections to be made in the congregation and the community, and thinking about what kind of model to use in a "relaunch" effort
- Yet another model, which advocates "24 Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return"

All of these are in the realm of "practical/tactical suggestions. Tucked away in them are the following brief statements:

- How might the Holy Spirit want to **leverage** our learning and our experience to expand His Kingdom's reign through us, His people? (MI)
- Read the Book of Acts - how can we use these lessons to **re-tool**? (LCEF)
- The third model doesn't mention the Holy Spirit at all

Notice the words "leverage" and "re-tool" in the above quotes - are these perhaps indicators that we are so encumbered by the use of process-thinking and business models to discuss our own activities that we fail to discuss the actual work of the Holy Spirit? After all, we Lutherans believe, teach, and confess that it is the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it in the one true faith" (Small Catechism).

A problem with the Nehemiah model is its premise that the people of God wanted to return from exile to reconstruct what they had lost, without due consideration of the possibility that some of what they had lost could not (or perhaps even should not) be precisely reconstructed - think of the grief of some of the older generation who had remembered the previous temple (Ezra 3:12).

The Book of Acts certainly gives plentiful evidence of the activities of the Apostles and the disciples of Christ in the period immediately following Jesus' ascension into heaven, but I fear that we most often read the Book of Acts as a DIY guide to how we might be able to replicate the disciples' ministry activities in our modern context. There is another way to read the Book of Acts, however, that does not involve a predetermined outcome of replication or reconstruction. We can read it to see what it was that the Holy Spirit was doing, and maybe learn something completely different. The following notes will look at thirteen activities of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

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I. The Holy Spirit BAPTIZED

Acts 1:2, 4-5, 8 - 4 *On one occasion, while Jesus was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." . . . 8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

- Jesus promised to give His disciples the Holy Spirit's power in something analogous to John's baptizing with water. In v. 5 Jesus draws a parallel (makes a distinction?) between John's baptism with water, and the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" they would receive (on Pentecost?). This is confirmed when Jesus says "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (v.8), leading some readers to conclude that the "power" of the Holy Spirit's baptism is parallel to the "water" of John's baptism.

Acts 8:14-17 - 14 *When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

In the city of Samaria there were believers who had "simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" but "the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them" (v. 16). The Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to Samaria; when Peter and John arrived and prayed for them with the laying on of hands, "they received the Holy Spirit," and this brought unity to the church in Jerusalem and in Samaria.

Acts 8:26-39 - Under the Spirit's direction, Philip baptized the Ethiopian
Summary - While Philip was in ministry in Samaria, the Holy Spirit told him to go to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza (v. 26), and there he met the eunuch from Ethiopia. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it" (v. 29), and after receiving Philip's explanation of Isaiah 53 the Ethiopian was baptized. "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing." (v. 39)

Questions to consider

1. **Where is the Holy Spirit's power in the Church in these [COVID-19] days?** Is it merely / primarily in creative technological "solutions," or is it in other, less obvious forms like prayer, worship and Sacraments, Scripture reading, and Sabbath rest?

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2. **Which of following might be proper forms for the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism** (something that, to my knowledge, hasn't been discussed)?

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- a. Suspend all Baptisms until all church services “return to normal”?
- b. Administer the Sacrament of Baptism as soon as possible upon request by someone sufficiently (minimally?) catechized? With or without witnesses?
- c. Administer the Sacrament of Baptism with just parents and sponsors present; livestream the Baptism so that others in the church may witness; use the form of Recognition of Holy Baptism when church services “return to normal”?



II. The Holy Spirit CALLED particular individuals to specific ministries

Acts 8:26-29 - The Holy Spirit called Philip to minister one-on-one with the Ethiopian eunuch

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** **The Spirit told Philip**, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Acts 10:1-22 - The Holy Spirit called Peter (through the vision and by the invitation of the representatives of Cornelius) to minister to Cornelius’ household

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. **2** He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. **3** One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked.

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. **5** Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. **6** He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his

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attendants. **8** He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. **10** He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. **11** He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. **12** It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. **13** Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. **18** They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. **20** So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." **23** Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Acts 13:1-3 - The Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to a missionary ministry, and told the other disciples to set them apart for this ministry

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. **2** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called

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them.” **3** So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 20:17-24 - The Holy Spirit compellingly called Paul to go to Jerusalem from Ephesus, even though Paul did not know what the result would be

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. **18** When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. **19** I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. **20** You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. **21** I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

22 “And now, **compelled by the Spirit**, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. **23** I only know that in every city **the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me**. **24** However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

Acts 21:4 - The disciples in Tyre urged Paul **“through the Holy Spirit”** NOT to go to Jerusalem

After we had torn ourselves away from the Elders from Ephesus, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. **2** We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. **3** After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. **4** We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. **Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.**

Questions to consider

1. Are we considering “returning to normal” because the ***Holy Spirit is calling us to do so***, or simply because “normal” is familiar?
2. How will we ***discern what the Holy Spirit may be calling us to do***, even if it doesn’t seem like the safe option?
3. How will we discern what the Holy Spirit may be calling us to do, even if there are ***other genuinely Spirit-filled and discerning believers who are hesitant?***
4. Is it possible that the Holy Spirit is calling us to a ***certain specific ministry*** in these days?

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5. Is it possible that He is calling us to a specific sort of **ministry that is different than what we are familiar with?**
6. Is it possible that He is calling us to a **ministry in a different place or context than the one we are familiar with?**
7. Is it possible that the Holy Spirit is calling us to some kind of **ministry for which only He knows the strategy, the tactics, and the results?**
8. Is it possible that, in these days, the Holy Spirit is saying **“Leave behind what you think you know and can do, and do something different under my call”?**

How will you respond to any of these questions for which the answer appears to be “Yes, it is possible”?

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III. The Holy Spirit COMPELLED

Acts 13:4ff. - The Holy Spirit called and sent Barnabas and Saul on their missionary journey

Acts 20:22 - Paul testifies to the Ephesian elders that the **Holy Spirit compelled him** to go to Jerusalem

Acts 21:4 - The disciples in Tyre urged Paul **“through the Holy Spirit”** NOT to go to Jerusalem

Questions to consider

1. Are you and your and your congregation preparing to “return to normal” because the **Holy Spirit is compelling you to do so**, or simply because “normal” is familiar?
2. How will you and your congregation **discern what the Holy Spirit may be compelling you to do**, even if it doesn’t seem like the safe option?
3. How will you and your congregation discern what the Holy Spirit may be compelling you to do, even if there are **other genuinely Spirit-filled and discerning believers who are hesitant?**

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IV. The Holy Spirit CONFRONTED

Acts 5:1-11 - Through Peter the ***Holy Spirit confronted Ananias (and later his wife Sapphira)*** with their sin of covetousness and lying to the Holy Spirit

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. **2** With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? **4** Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. **6** Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **11** Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Acts 13:4ff. - Through Paul and Barnabas ***the Holy Spirit confronted the Jewish sorcerer Elymas / Bar-Jesus*** for his opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, **7** who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. **9** Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, **10** "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? **11** Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. **12** When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

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Acts 16:16ff. - Through Paul ***the Holy Spirit confronted a slave woman in Phillipi*** who had a [demonic] spirit of fortune-telling, and exorcised the spirit from her.

Acts 19:11-16 - An evil Spirit fights back

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, **12** so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” **14** Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. **15** One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” **16** Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Acts 20:22 - Paul testifies to the Ephesian elders that the ***Holy Spirit compelled him*** to go to Jerusalem

22 “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. **23** I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. **24** However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”

Acts 21:4 - The disciples in Tyre urged Paul ***“through the Holy Spirit”*** NOT to go to Jerusalem

Questions to consider

1. In your prayerful deliberations with your congregation, have you taken into consideration ***the degree to which the Evil One desires to see your ministry plans fail miserably?*** How will you recognize his activity? How will you confront it?
2. ***How will you discern*** whether a particular confrontation is due to human sin, pride, and stubbornness, or due to satanic influence?
3. ***How will you discern the intention of the Holy Spirit*** when a disagreement appears to be one of genuine faith and unrelated to sin, stubbornness, or satanic influence?
4. In any confrontation or disagreement in these days, ***how might you respond with grace and mercy, and even in the spirit of reconciliation?***

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V. The Holy Spirit EMPOWERED

Acts 1:4-8 - 4 *On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit.” 6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Questions to consider

1. **Think back through your life story.** Where and in what ways have you seen / witnessed / experienced something that seemed like the Holy Spirit was working in power? (It doesn't have to be in spectacular ways only; sometimes the experience of His power is subtle)
2. **Think back through the history of your congregation.** Where and in what ways have you seen / witnessed / experienced something that seemed like the Holy Spirit was working in power? (Again, it doesn't have to be in spectacular ways only; sometimes the experience of His power is subtle)
3. **Think of your personal and congregational activities and programming over the past year** (until the coronavirus shut-down). Where and in what ways have you seen / witnessed / experienced something that seemed like the Holy Spirit was working in power?
4. **Think of your personal and congregational activities and programming over the past 8 weeks** (since the coronavirus shut-down). Where and in what ways have you seen / witnessed / experienced something that seemed like the Holy Spirit was working in power?
5. Reviewing all these questions, **in what parts of your activities and programming have you NOT seen / witnessed / experienced something that seemed like the Holy Spirit was working in power?**
6. Which of the items identified in questions 1-4 are **activities and programming items you may want to retain** as you “return to normal”? Which of the items in question 5 are **activities and programming items you should dispense with?**



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VI. The Holy Spirit ENLIGHTENED

Acts 1:2-3 - I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Acts 8:26-39 - 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." [Isaiah 53:7,8]

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" 37 Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Acts 10:9-20 - 9 About noon the following day . . . Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet [a tarp] being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a

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second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” 16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

Questions to consider

1. **How much are you relying on the following sources** for “guidance and direction” in these days? Why?
 - a. Government officials
 - b. Scientists / medical personnel / researchers
 - c. News outlets
 - d. Social media
 - e. Members of your congregation
 - f. Friends and neighbors
 - g. God’s Word
2. **How are you helping your family to rely on the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God** these days?
3. **How are you helping your congregation to rely on the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God** these days?



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VII. The Holy Spirit FILLED

Acts 2:1-4 - *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples who were gathered in the house, with the result that the disciples

- Began to speak in other languages (Acts 2:4)
- Experienced Prophecy / visions / dreams in fulfillment of previous prophecies (Acts 2:21 = Joel 2:28-32; Acts 4:25 = Psalm 2:1)
- Preached in power that led to repentance and faith for thousands (Acts 2:40-41)

Acts 4:5-8 - *5 The rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!*

Peter was able to respond to the charges of the Sanhedrin because the Holy Spirit filled him

Acts 6:1-5 - *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.*

The qualifications for the seven chosen as Deacons were that they should be "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."

Acts 8:14-19 - *14 - When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 When Simon [the sorcerer] saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered*

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them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Believers in Samaria received the Holy Spirit when Peter and John placed their hands on them (prompting Simon the Sorcerer to attempt to franchise the power of the Spirit)

Acts 9:17 - *Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

After Saul's conversion Ananias went to the blinded Saul in the house where he was staying "so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" - although the rest of Acts 9 does not indicate that this "filling" was instantly completed in Saul - in fact, his first attempt at preaching the Gospel was met with complete rejection (whereas Peter's was met with astounding acceptance, Acts 2:41).

Acts 10:44-47 - *44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*

Through Peter's message the Holy Spirit filled the members of the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, so that they were speaking in tongues and praising God. Peter also baptized these Gentiles in recognition that they had received the Holy Spirit like other believers.

Acts 11:22-24 - *22 News of [the growth of the church in Antioch] reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*

Barnabas described as "filled with the Holy Spirit," encouraged the new church in Antioch

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Some notes on “the filling of the Holy Spirit”

When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost Sunday (50 days after Easter), “all of them were **filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). While the focus is often on the visible results of the coming of the Holy Spirit - speaking in tongues (v.4), thousands of people coming to faith (v.41), the building of a community of believers (v.42-47) - let’s think for a few moments about this idea of the “filling” by the Holy Spirit.

But first, let’s think about “non-holy spirits.”

There are a number of examples in the Gospels and Acts of encounters with “impure” or “evil” spirits by Jesus or the disciples. Some of the manifestations of these “possessions” seem similar to the “filling by the Holy Spirit” -

- unusual speech
 - Acts 2:4 - *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*
 - Mark 3:11 - *11 Whenever the impure spirits saw [Jesus], they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”*
- miracles/signs/wonders
 - Acts 8:6 - *When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said*
 - Acts 8:9-13 - *Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. 12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*
- prophecies/fortunetelling
 - Acts 11:28 - *One of [the prophets who came to the church in Antioch from Jerusalem], named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)*
 - Acts 16:16-18 - *16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer [in Philippi], we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” 18 She kept this up for*

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many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

There is no testimony, however, that the Holy Spirit inflicted any actual physical harm upon the people that He "filled."

- Demons convulsed some (Mark 1:26 - *The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek*)
- Demons harmed others repeatedly (Mark 5:5 - *Night and day among the tombs and in the hills [the man possessed by a legion of demons] would cry out and cut himself with stones*)
- Demons threw still others into fireplaces (Mark 9:14-27 - *When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him")*).

In fact, ***the working of the Holy Spirit through the disciples often resulted in healings and even resurrection from the dead***

- Acts 3 - *Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.*
- Acts 8:6-7 - *When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.*
- Acts 9:36-41- *36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. 40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.*

The question then is ***"why does the Scripture say that demons 'possess' but the Holy Spirit 'fills'"?*** Perhaps because God sees believers as

- His children whom He loves (1 John 3:1 - *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*)

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- The flock that He cherishes (Luke 12:32 - *Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom*)
- The people of His everlasting promises (I Peter 2:9-10 - *9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*)

On the other hand, Satan sees people as things to be possessed (Mark 5 - the man with a legion of spirits), exploited (Acts 16:16 - *16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer in Philippi, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling*), and discarded when they've served his purposes (Acts 8:7 - *With shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed*).

Thus, the Holy Spirit is a gift given by the God Who is love, and is completely unlike a spirit of domination inflicted upon someone by Satan who desires our destruction.

Questions to consider

1. ***What has "the filling of the Holy Spirit" looked like / felt like in your life?*** When has it occurred? Under what circumstances?
2. ***What has "the filling of the Holy Spirit" looked like / felt like in your congregation's life?*** When has it occurred? Under what circumstances?
3. Not that we can replicate "the filling of the Holy Spirit" by controlling circumstances (Jesus likened the Spirit with the wind, John 3:8); but we do erect wind turbines in places where our experience has shown there is likely to be more wind more consistently than in other places. ***What might you do in your life or the life of your congregation to be ready for the filling of the Holy Spirit, whenever He decides to come?***

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VIII. The Holy Spirit GATHERED

Acts 8:29, 39 - The Holy Spirit gathered the Ethiopian eunuch through Philip's ministry

Acts 10:19ff. - The Holy Spirit gathered Cornelius and his household through Peter's ministry

Acts 11:24 - The Holy Spirit gathered many in Antioch through the ministry of Barnabas

Questions to consider

1. ***What individuals*** are you aware of that the Holy Spirit may want to gather into the people of God through your individual or congregational ministry?
2. ***What households or groups of people in your community*** are you aware of that the Holy Spirit may want to gather into the people of God through your congregational ministry?
3. ***Who else besides you may the Holy Spirit be ready to use*** to gather people into the church? How might you encourage them to be used by the Holy Spirit?



IX. The Holy Spirit PREACHED

Acts 2:14-41 - Peter's sermon on Pentecost Sunday

Acts 4:8ff - Peter's sermon to the Sanhedrin

Acts 10:38, 44-47 - Peter's message to Cornelius' household

Questions to consider

1. ***What has your preaching been like up until March 2020?***
 - a. ***Audience*** - mixed group of families and individuals, in the sanctuary?
 - b. ***Place*** - from the pulpit? from the chancel? in the nave?
 - c. ***Style*** - expository? goal-malady-means? lecture? proclamation? outline? Conversational? various styles?
 - d. ***Intent*** - evangelism? instruction? Sanctification? transformation?
2. ***What has your preaching been like since the coronavirus shut-down?*** The same as above, or
 - a. Do you see your "audience" as ***individuals on the other side of the camera*** as opposed to a group?
 - b. Can you picture yourself ***preaching in someone's kitchen, living room, or den*** rather than from a pulpit?
 - c. How might you modify your style to ***focus more on individuals in their homes*** than on groups in the sanctuary? What do you suppose an individual or a family might need to hear from you? How do you suppose you might talk to them?
 - d. To what degree might you "tweak" your intent to ***include comfort in an age of anxiety?***

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3. *If you modify your preaching during the coronavirus*, will you keep it that way after a “return to normal” or will you revert back to the way you were preaching before?



X. The Holy Spirit PREVENTED

Acts 16:6-7

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, **having been kept by the Holy Spirit** from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, **but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.**

Questions to consider

1. **Think of your life story.** Can you identify any events or periods in your life where it seems now that the Holy Spirit was preventing you from a course of action He did not wish you to take? How / when did you know that He was preventing you?
2. **Think of your congregation’s story.** Can you identify any events or periods in your congregation’s life where it seems now that the Holy Spirit was preventing you all from a course of action He did not wish you to take? How / when did you know that He was preventing you?
3. In what ways, if any, does it seem like **the Holy Spirit has been using this coronavirus situation to curtail** certain courses of action He did not wish you or your congregation to take? Or **to prevent** you or your congregation from taking certain courses of action as you consider “re-opening?”



XI. The Holy Spirit PROPHESED

Acts 2:17, 18, 33, 38 - Peter explained to the crowd on Pentecost that the descent of the Holy Spirit was according to prophecy (Joel’s); as a result of this sermon many believed in Jesus Christ

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! **16** No, **this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel** ^{[Joel 2:28-32].}

¹⁷ “*In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.*

¹⁸ *Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. . . .*

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³³ “. . . Exalted to the right hand of God, [Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

*“The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand
³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”* ¹[Psalm 110:1]

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Acts 4:25, 31 - Peter explained to the believers in Jerusalem that all the events of Jesus' life and the subsequent experiences of the believers were according to prophecy

²³ On their release from prison, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ **You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:**

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ *The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.* ¹[Psalm 2:1,2]

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Acts 19:6 - Believers in Ephesus who had only been baptized with John's baptism prophesied when they received the Holy Spirit from Paul

¹While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³ So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John's baptism,” they replied.

⁴ Paul said, “John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, **the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.** ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

Acts 21:4, 9,11 - Some of the disciples in Tyre urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem “through the Spirit”; in Caesarea the daughters of Philip prophesied, as did Agabus when he came down from Judea.

After we had torn ourselves away from the Elders from Ephesus, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ² We found a ship

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crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³ After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. **Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.** ⁵ When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. ⁶ After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ **He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.**

¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, **a prophet named Agabus** came down from Judea.

¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Note: in some Christian circles the gift of prophecy in the modern church is understood to be something like "a message from the Lord for a specific individual or group in a specific situation" and is somewhat different from preaching in that (1) it does not seem to reside in the office of the Pastor, (2) it doesn't necessarily explain a portion of Scripture. In the best understanding of modern prophecy, there are also three criteria for evaluating prophecy: (1) is the person who is claiming to be a prophet subject to the oversight of a pastor and elders of a local church? (2) is a particular "prophetic" statement of theirs consistent with the Word of God revealed in Holy Scripture? and (3) can a particular "prophetic" statement be shown to have fulfillment (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)?

Questions to consider

1. In your congregation, **who is responsible for evaluating** whatever tactical suggestions are made (whether from outside sources or from within your congregation) regarding "re-opening"?
2. Which of any of the tactical plans to "re-open" your congregation are **consistent with the Word of God revealed in Holy Scripture?**
3. Which of the tactical plans to "re-open" your congregation are **not consistent with the Word of God revealed in Holy Scripture?**

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XIII. The Holy Spirit gave VISIONS

Acts 2:17, 18, 33 - In his Pentecost sermon Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel, that “your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams” and indicated that the Pentecost phenomenon was the fulfillment of this prophecy.

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! **16** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel ^[Joel 2:28-32].

*¹⁷ “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, **your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.***

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. . . .

Acts 7:55-59 - Stephen received a vision of the glory of God and Jesus at His right hand after his testimony, before he was killed.

⁵⁵ But **Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God**, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Acts 16:9-10 - Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia begging Paul and his team to come over to Macedonia for ministry

⁹ During the night **Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia** standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Questions to consider

1. **Have you or a member of your congregation had a particularly vivid image or picture** (a “vision,” perhaps) of what ministry might look like after the coronavirus? Whom you might serve? Activities you might engage in?
2. **How have you discerned** whether such a vision came from the Holy Spirit, or just from someone’s imagination?
3. If you decide that the vision is from the Holy Spirit, **how might you implement it?**



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XII. The Holy Spirit SANCTIFIED

Acts 8:29, 39 - After his instruction and Baptism, the **Ethiopian eunuch** “went on his way rejoicing.”

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

31 “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”^[Isaiah 53:7,8]

34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and ***the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”*** 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 9:26-30 - Three years after the conversion of **Saul** (Galatians 1:18) and his internship in Jerusalem, “the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” (Acts 9:31)

26 When Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the

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name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30 When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Acts 10 - The Holy Spirit showed Peter in his vision and with subsequent events that He was going to make the **Gentiles in Cornelius' household** "clean" (holy) when Peter had thought that could never happen

27 While talking with Cornelius, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

30 Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that

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the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, 47 “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. ***They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.***” 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:23-29 - The Council of Apostles in Jerusalem followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the sanctification of the Gentiles should not be a burden to them

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 ***It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us*** not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

Questions to consider

1. What individuals or groups of people affiliated with your congregation need ***special encouragement in their faith life?***
2. What individuals or groups of people affiliated with your congregation need to know ***the love and acceptance of the community of believers?***
3. What individuals or groups of people affiliated with your congregation need to be ***assured of their participation in the community of believers*** even while isolated at home?
4. ***What burdens might individuals in your congregation be struggling with***, that they need assurance that the Holy Spirit and Jesus can and will lift those burdens from them? (including the potential burden of guilt if they decide not to participate in a “re-opening” of the congregation for some time)?



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Part 2 - A New Normal?

Leaving aside the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus Himself (in His conception and at His baptism, for instance), it's commonly supposed / said that the Holy Spirit was first "given" to the disciples on Pentecost Sunday. Certainly he came upon them in spectacular fashion (Acts 2), but Pentecost was not the first time the Holy Spirit had come to the disciples.

The evening of His resurrection, when Jesus appeared to His disciples He said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:21-23) Whether or not Jesus was limiting the work of the Spirit to the ministry of forgiveness until Pentecost, or whether not He was telling them that forgiveness would be the bedrock of all their ministry, is beside the point here. The point is that the disciples had already received the Holy Spirit from Jesus on the evening of His resurrection, fifty days before Pentecost.

St. Luke notes (Acts 1:2) that Jesus was taken up into heaven "after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen." Whether this statement refers only to His last words on the mountain (Matthew 28) or to His teaching as early as the conversation on the road to Emmaus and subsequent appearances, it is fairly clear that the Holy Spirit was working at least in some kind of "partnership" with the risen-but-not-yet-ascended Jesus.

At Pentecost, of course, they would "receive the Holy Spirit" in a manner and with a result that they had never experienced before. Think of it this way: Up until His Ascension, the disciples had spent three years in the presence of Jesus, but at His Ascension that would all come to an end. In fact, at His Ascension some still had hopes that He might restore the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Their lives, in fact the entire world, would be different without the immediate presence of Jesus they had been used to; there was no more "normal" for them to get back to, so it would be pointless for them to attempt to reconstruct without Jesus what they had with Jesus when He was physically with them. However, the gift of the Holy Spirit would show them at least that even though reconstruction might be impossible, there could still be a new creation in which they might participate.

Questions to consider

1. What if we (people? pastors? churches?) might look at ***this quarantine period as the end of one way of life and the beginning of something entirely new*** rather than as an exile from which we think we'd like to return?
2. What might our ***people*** be like?
3. What would we ***pastors*** be like?
4. What might our ***churches*** be like?

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ACTS 14 & 16:1-5

14:1 At **Iconium** Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ² But **the Jews who refused to believe** stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. ⁴ **The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.** ⁵ There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the gospel.

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel, but sometimes people **refuse to believe**.

⁸ In **Lystra** there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, **“The gods have come down to us in human form!”** ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these

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worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel, but sometimes people **have preconceptions.**

¹⁹ **Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.** ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for **Derbe.**

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel, but sometimes people **respond with anger or even violence.**

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. **Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,** ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel, but sometimes **the harvest requires multiple efforts.**

THE WORKINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. **27** On arriving there, **they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.** **28** And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. . . .

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel, and it's **important to celebrate the harvest** when it happens.

16:1 Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. **2** The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. **3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.** **4** As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. **5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Gospel, but sometimes people **need to see actions** as well as preaching.