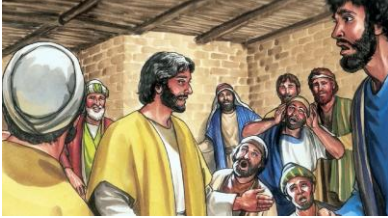


Gospel lesson

<stop sharing screen in Zoom>

After His resurrection, Jesus renews His disciples in a similar manner to that by which God gave life to Adam at creation and to the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley. Pay attention to what He tells them after.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-104-appearance-thomas/>;
credit: Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

John 20:19-23

NRSVUE

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

The Word of God for the people of God

<Interactive time>

What is this? <Hold up bubble soap; Let them respond>

How does it work? <Let them respond; follow instructions goofily until blowing bubbles>

So, you have to make sure the wand has the appropriate amount of soap on it and aim where you blow to make the bubbles form.

Did Jesus just show up and blow on the disciples? What did He do first? <Let them respond>

So, Jesus brought them peace and let them see His hands and side to get them ready for Him to breathe on them.

Do all soap mixtures work equally well for blowing bubbles? <Let them respond>

The ratio of the ingredients matters, and which is best depends on the environment where it is used.

Jesus spent time before His death and resurrection prepping the disciples, getting them ready for the post-resurrection environment in which they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Can you blow too slowly or too fast? <Let them respond>

At a campsite where the speed limit is 15 mph, I like to put down the window on the passenger side while my husband drives so that I can hold a soap-filled wand

out - and let a stream of bubbles go behind us as we pass the various campsites. I can tell if my husband goes faster because it whips the soap off the wand without forming any bubbles (like when we accelerate on the road outside the campground); if he slows down too much, the air displacement is not strong enough to form bubbles.

How do you think the speed and force by which the Holy Spirit descends affect us? <Let them respond>

I think God is very aware of our capabilities and limitations. I have found that using a long, steady stream of air enables big bubbles to come out of a small wand. I think God breathes the Holy Spirit into each one of us in the most effective way possible, that we may grow in spirit to be the best we can be - and even more beautiful and amazing than soap bubbles.

<resume sharing screen in Zoom >

<Hymn "A Charge to Keep I Have"

UMH #413>

<stop sharing screen in Zoom>

Message: So That They May Be One



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/god-poured-out/pentecost-sunday-year-a-planning-worship/day-of-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Holy Lord who dwells in our midst,
as we take time now to further consider today's

scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may be empowered to proclaim Your glory at all times and in all places. Amen.

“Pentecost Sunday celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers, empowering the church for mission and proclaiming that God’s Spirit is unbound and available to all.”

I have a full house this weekend and spent a lot of time prepping for it: cleaning, making beds, shopping for and making food. I had some apprehensions about getting it all done, especially as Keven has been busier than usual and was not able to help me.

Once people arrived, our house was filled with a lot more chaos and love. Whatever needs come up get addressed amidst chatter and a desire for all of us to be well. Our relationships are strengthened in spending time with one another. I feel the presence of God in such moments.

Imagine if every relationship we have was based in the healthy, nurturing love of God.

- ✝ If, instead of expecting simply our own fulfillment in transactions, we prepare to help the other person have a better day in some way;
- ✝ If we spend time sharing the “image of God” side of our humanity rather than forgetting the person

before us is human too;

- ✝ If we let God bless us through the events of our lives instead of grouching about the difficulty or inconvenience to us.

We can have a life in which all of our relationships are based in the healthy, nurturing love of God, for God is with us - in each and every moment, whether we recognize it or not. Although we tend to hide in fear rather than stepping out of our comfort zones, although we tend to be jealous of other people's abilities rather than celebrating the gift God has given us in them, God calls us to get involved in the world and empowers us to do so.

Many people today do not recognize God in action, chalking up what happens to other things with which they are more familiar. Some of the people in biblical times, coming to Jerusalem at Pentecost after Jesus had ascended, did not recognize God in action either; they chalked up the disciples' ability to witness to being drunk!

But the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, did not let that stop them from telling everyone about what God was doing in their midst. Those with the Spirit of God resting on them had to speak - much like we heard about in the reading from Numbers.

Seventy elders prophesied when the Spirit was upon them. In the Old Testament, seventy signifies completion of the natural order.¹ More than seventy

¹ <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/theres-something-special-about-the-number-70/>;
<https://biblehub.com/topical/s/seventy.htm>

indicates some really special act of God's, which may be confusing to those expecting things to be done through known channels.

In Numbers, Joshua - who would lead the Israelites after Moses died - thought something was wrong when two of the men in the camp prophesied in addition to the elders in the tent. Thinking he was doing the right thing, he asked Moses to stop them - but Moses recognized the hand of God at work and taught Joshua to appreciate it wherever it was, not limiting it to where the administration expected it to be.

Jesus too had to teach His disciples not to think of limits on God's power. They were locked in a room, afraid, and He appeared to bring them peace. He then empowered them with the Holy Spirit, giving them responsibility in the forgiveness of sins.

No longer is it only God who can forgive sins. The Holy Spirit is unbound. The followers of God are not to be passive in our relationship with the Divine, only able to be forgiven. When we accept the Holy Spirit into our hearts, claiming Jesus as our Savior, what we do matters before God - our actions have eternal consequences.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” If sin makes the world sick, do you think God wants us retaining sins? How do we fulfill the responsibility God gives us by dwelling in our midst?

✝ First, celebrate what our amazing God has given us!

- ✝ Second, trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not all accept Jesus into their hearts, but those who do are transformed. Do not deny others that option!
- ✝ Pray for guidance and step out as you are led to do. What we do with one another matters before God.

In that trust and with that guidance, live in open, honest community, sharing the love of God with all as Jesus commanded us to do.

Let us pray:²

Holy God, we ask for your help, your power, your Spirit, so that we can amend our lives and grow more each day into the image of Christ.

We confess that we fear what is different.

We confess that it's easier to lock the doors of our community than to receive those who don't look like we look, love like we love, or vote the way we vote.

We confess that we have not lived out your call to share in abundant life and unconditional love.

We believe that you have the power to turn us around to a more inclusive way of living, so we ask you to do that.

We ask you to give us the courage to change.

We ask that you give us the energy, intelligence, imagination, and love to be your people in all we say and do. Amen.

² Prayer Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good." Used with permission. <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession/>; reposted at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/god-poured-out/pentecost-sunday-year-a-planning-worship/day-of-pentecost-year-a-liturgical-resources>.