

## A Resurrection Response

### Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, ...

<sup>36</sup> "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." <sup>40</sup> And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

On Easter Sunday we heard Mary Magdalene's sermon to come and see, "I have seen the risen Lord!" Last Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter, he heard Peter's sermon on the meaning of the resurrection. Today is the third Sunday of Easter and we learn about the response of those who heard those two Easter messages. Peter, the eleven, and the long-term disciples had followed Jesus from Galilee, heard his teaching and witnessed his miracles.

It is the day of Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival period historically commemorating the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, fifty days (Gk. *pentecoste*, "fifty") after the exodus from Egypt. In this initial sermon, Peter sets the stage for the developing Christian community as a people whose primary task is to "witness" to the events they have seen and heard.

Jesus has departed. The group replaced Judas and organized the mission for the community (Acts 1). Jesus' followers immediately engage in the process for continuing the mission that Jesus has set for them to become "witnesses" to the "ends of the earth" (1:8; cf. 1:22).

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus' followers are "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4), a promise Jesus gave the disciples (Luke 24:49). The immediate result of this empowerment is that they speak in the various languages represented in the audience on that day (2:4-11a). The "global" audience who speak in a variety of languages were "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs," 2:9-11).

Peter's speech addresses questions this phenomenon raises: How are we hearing these Galileans speak in our native languages? What does this mean? Are they drunk? You remember Peter's resurrection sermon from Acts 2: 22-32. (1) Peter draws on Joel to explain the pouring out of the Spirit upon sons, daughters, and slaves as one of the signs of God's final redemption (2:16-21); (2) he charges Jesus' own religious leaders with the death of Jesus "by the hands of those outside the law" (2:22-23); (3) he draws on the psalms of David, through whom the Spirit speaks to highlight God's resurrection of Jesus, a descendant of David (2:24-35).

The central feature of Peter's speech is defining the kind of Messiah Jesus was. In ancient Judaism, most people expected the messianic figure to be a political figure with access to military power. He would arrive on the scene to throw off the political overlords of the day. He would reestablish the empire of David in the world and inaugurate God's empire. Peter's emphasis is different.

Peter calls on his listeners to "repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit." Repentance is central to Peter's message to Israelites (2:38; 3:19; 8:22) and Paul's message to Gentiles (17:30; 26:20). The term is associated with seeking forgiveness for thinking incorrectly (cf. 2:38; 3:19) and acting inappropriately (8:22). The idea of repentance is also directly associated with the "gift of the Holy Spirit" for the Israelites (2:38). **Emerson B. Powery**

Peter offered repentance, baptism, and the Holy Spirit for the longing of the human heart for the life offered in the gospel and three thousand sought to enter the new community of faith. Peter had three thousand inquirers asking what to do. He responds—"Repent, and be baptized" (v. 38). Baptism also contains this call. Descent into the waters portrays death to old ways, and rising up signifies new birth in Christ, the actions embodying the call for repentance, a changed mind (cf. Rom. 6:3-14). We are not merely born to better ethical and moral behavior. We are born to life in Christ, joined to Christ's body the church. We need a transformed mind to begin to see through Christ's eyes, and to guide our transformed lives participating in his mission of reconciliation and justice.

Peter also emphasizes baptism as a gracious gift, when he extends the call for "every one of you" to be baptized by saying that the promise is also "for your children" (v. 39). Peter's directions to the new converts: "you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). This gift they will receive is the very presence of the Holy Spirit, God dwelling within and working to make us new people in Christ (see Gal. 5:16-25). They will also receive the kinds of gifts for service Paul writes about in his letters, and faith itself (see 1 Cor. 12:4-12, 27-31; cf. Eph. 2:8). No matter how we understand this gift, both the call and the promise remain powerful. The call is to those who were there hearing the gospel: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation," he says (v. 40). This call is not merely personal. When he says, "The promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away" (v. 39), he calls them to bring that promise to others.

God's gracious intention is to draw in many. God's intention is to reach out even beyond the bounds of the nation and religion. The disciples are witnesses to Jesus "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). To belong to Christ through repentance and baptism is to receive a call. We are to participate in Christ's mission, taking the promise of forgiveness in Jesus and

new life through the Spirit to our neighbors and communities, our nations and the world. **Gary Neal Hansen**

Our scripture describes the overwhelming response of people from the crowd—many of whom are baptized that very day. Whatever else Peter has said, here he asserts the messianic identity of Jesus and his innocent death at the hand of his detractors, and people respond. They are converted, even to the point of baptism in Christ's name.

This is the story Luke is led to reveal, the story of Christianity's unique message growing up in the midst of both real spiritual quest and great diversity. Peter's sermon begins with the common ground, with shared Scripture and tradition. It is in the form of a narrative and an appeal. Peter explained that Jesus died, but he lives again and the Spirit that he promised has appeared. **Susan B. W. Johnson**

Rowan Williams's words in a 2009 speech on "Ethics, Economics, and Global Justice" prove insightful:

What religious belief has to say in the context of our present crisis is, first, a call to lament the brokenness of the world and invite that change of heart which is so pivotal throughout the Jewish and Christian scriptures; and, second, to declare without ambiguity or qualification that human value rests on God's creative love and not on possession or achievement. It is not for believers to join in the search for scapegoats, because there will always be, for the religious self, an awareness of complicity in social evil.

A pastor once asked a group of vacation Bible school children what forgiveness felt like. The class of six-year-olds looked up at him blankly. Suddenly, an expression came over one child's face. It was clear that an idea had struck. He smiled knowingly and raised his hand. "I know what forgiveness feels like," said the child. "It feels like it's your birthday. It feels like you get to start again new."

In his Pentecost sermon Peter is inviting fellow sinners to start again new. The Holy Spirit is guiding the people of God into new life, and a sacred community called the church is being born. This Third Sunday of Easter is a time for us to surrender our defenses and rejoin the movement. **Timothy B. Hare**

Just as God gave the Law to Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai to initiate the shaping of the identity of a people, so the *Messiah* is responsible for the giving of the Spirit to shape the (new) identity of this new people. For these early Spirit-inspired followers of Jesus, the Messiah himself is a charismatic, Spirit-granting agent of God. God's Spirit continues to inspire and shape the identity of the Christian community today! **Emerson B. Powery**

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