

Sunday, May 28, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“He Breathed on Them”
Acts 2:1-21 and John 20:19-23

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What comes to mind when you hear the term ‘Holy Spirit?’”

Acts 2:1-21. Context. In the Jewish calendar, the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot in Hebrew) came fifty days (7 weeks) after the Feast of Passover. This was the second of the three annual pilgrimage feasts that all Jews coming from wherever they lived were expected to celebrate at the Temple in Jerusalem at some point in their lives. As the Feast of Passover celebrated God’s liberation of the people from bondage in Egypt, so the Feast of Weeks celebrated God’s giving the Law to Moses and the people at Mt. Sinai. Today Jews observe the Feast of Weeks with several traditions: reading the Torah and other sacred texts throughout the night on the eve of Pentecost (to make up for the Israelites who reportedly got up late on the day when God gave the Torah); eating only dairy products – blintzes, cheesecake, etc. (when God gave the Torah, they realized that they had no kosher meat or utensils); decorating homes and synagogues with tree branches and flowers (the Israelites had found Mt. Sinai lush with flowers and vegetation). “Pentecost” is the Greek term for ‘50’ and the Greek name for the Feast of Weeks. For Christians, the Feast of Pentecost is the celebration of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian Church.

John 20:19-23. Context. In John’s account of Easter Sunday, after the risen Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and she reports this to the other disciples, Jesus appears to the others as well. Immediately the story moves to the equivalent of the Pentecost experience: the giving of the Holy Spirit. Jesus literally breathes new life into the disciples, and they are sent into the world by Jesus, even as Jesus was sent by God. Jesus mentions the forgiving and retaining of sins as part of their commission; but in the fourth gospel, sin is not so much a moral reality, a good or bad deed, as it is a theological orientation: sin is not to see that God, and God’s love, is revealed in Jesus. In this context, forgiving or retaining sin might be better understood as the response of those who hear the message and either embrace it or reject it. The disciples’ role is principally to proclaim the message that becomes the occasion for their hearers to make their choice. (The phrase, “the Jews” is again to be understood here to refer to the religious leaders of the day.)

Read Acts 2:1-21 and 1 John 20:19-23

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Acts 2:1-21 and John 20:19-23 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- When the disciples were gathered in fear (John 20:19), Jesus came to them and offered peace. Have you experienced the peace that comes from Jesus in the midst of a time of great fear? What did that look like? What other words describe the feelings of a group of people gathering in fear?
- In Acts 2:16, Peter addressed the bewildered crowd, explaining their ability to hear their own languages from the mouths of the Galileans: *"No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel."* What significance would the words of the prophet have had for the gathered Jews of that day?
- The portrayal of breath and wind in John 20 and Acts 2 respectively inspire very different images to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit. What differences do you notice? What similarities? Which does your heart long for at this time?
- In our lectionary passage from John 20, Jesus brings peace to the fearful disciples. Concerning John 20, The preaching notes say, *"We don't create this peace. We receive it. Like a breath."* In your community and around you, who needs to receive the peace of Christ?
- Reread Acts 2:17-18. Who is included in receiving this gift of the Spirit? What will they do as a result of the Spirit being poured out upon them? How do you see yourself and your community responding to the gift of the Holy Spirit? What will you do as a result of this gift?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Come again into our world, Holy Spirit. Breathe peace into anxious and fear-filled hearts. Send your wind and fire to all the followers of Christ, that we would boldly share your Good News with all the world. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.