



Image: United Nations

### **Acts 2:1-21 NRSV**

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.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both

Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

## **Background**

Happy Birthday, Church! Pentecost is a season of great excitement. This is the day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the people. It is a reminder that God never leaves us without an intercessor. In the scriptures, the Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as "The Advocate." We've been in Acts and focusing on the works of the Holy Spirit in difficult times. Last week we studied Christ's ascension into heaven and empathized with the disciples who were left behind without him. This week, we will be focusing on what God gives us through the Holy Spirit, even as Christ has left us physically. In your own devotional period, spend some time reading the entire chapter. What images come as you read?

Today's lesson will focus on the **Holy Spirit's value of each life.**

**Read the scripture out loud together.**

**Discuss with someone in your home. Take fifteen seconds to write down as many neighborhoods in Brooklyn as you can. Write them on a piece of paper. Challenge someone in your home. Who won? Now look at the list you have. Are there opinions about the people who live in these neighborhoods? Any rivalries? Any historic facts you can think of?**

**What's happening during this passage?**

This passage details the miracle of Pentecost. "They" were all together in one place. At once, a boom was heard and it filled the entire house. Fire rested on each person's head, and they began to speak in other languages. The text is clear to paint a vivid picture of "Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem." As they heard, there was confusion. How was it possible that we could all understand one another? Some even said, "they must be drunk!" Peter replies to this with, "It's only 9 am, we are not drunk." He begins to quote the prophet Joel who foretold a day in which the "Spirit" will be "poured out on all flesh." All genders, all ages, all economic conditions.

**What miracles can you see here?**

It might be easy to see the miracle as the tongues of flames that rested on their head. Even before that part, there's a miracle in the first verse. They were "all together in one place." They were gathered because of the Jewish festival of Shavuoth. This is the festival that celebrates the harvest (Exodus 34:22 and Deuteronomy 16:10). The people were gathered because they were already celebrating a culturally significant season for Jews.

In this season, we might be more moved by the image of people gathering. What does it take to get multiple people together in one room? It takes coordination, planning, messaging. These days, to have multiple people in one place, we must make accommodations for traffic, airflow, access, and sanitizing schedules. Being together in one place is the beginning of a miracle. Of course, we don't have to be *physically* in one space to be "all together in one place." Pentecost can still be significant as we are in our own spaces.

Another miracle is that diverse groups of people spoke in their native tongue, and all were able to understand in their hearing. In today's language, we might say, "The Spanish-speaking Dominicans from Washington Heights listened while the French-speaking Senegalese were talking. The Dominicans could understand what the Senegalese were saying." There was no translation into a middle language like English. There was no pointing and makeshift sign language. People showed up as they were, and the *Holy Spirit did the translating* in the ears of those who would hear. No one had to change themselves to be valued and visited by the Spirit.

### **How do people respond to this display?**

This display was strange. Imagine the cacophony of voices and chatter all at once. It may have sounded like Grand Central Station during rush hour or the Dance Africa festival on opening weekend. To those looking on, it seemed like "they must be drunk." Peter insists that they're not drunk because obviously it's only 9 am. Perhaps he said this with some snark. But he points out the absurdity of this phenomenon being blamed on drunkenness. Why do you assume that we're indecent or criminal when God is doing something miraculous in our lives?

Onlookers, then and now, have a hard time seeing things for what they are. So instead of being curious about the miracle, some people assumed the worst. Sometimes God does things that are indiscernible to human eyes.

## **Why does Peter reference the passage in Joel?**

This happens frequently in New Testament passages. Jesus frequently referred to portions of the Torah in his own teachings. This is a reminder that the people of this time are not “Christian.” The text describes “Jews from every nation under heaven.” It’s important that we pay attention to this because Peter, like Jesus before him, is using what people know to make a point. He’s using the holy text to appeal to the audience. Those gathered would have reverence for the prophet Joel. And Joel details a very radical vision. In short, Christianity does not replace Judaism. The people gathered here are culturally and religiously Jewish people who have been following Christ’s message.

## **What is God doing in this story?**

God, by way of the Holy Spirit, pours the spirit on ALL flesh. God says “your sons and daughters shall prophesy,” thus disrupting norms of sexism. God says, “your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams,” thus disrupting norms of ageism. God says, “even upon my slaves,” thus disrupting economic exploitation and classism. God disrupts the way things usually go, so much so that onlookers think the people are drunk. God disrupts the natural world, even saying “the Sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood.”

## ***What questions do you still have of this scripture?***

***How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?***



## **Connection to Today’s World**

Matthew Maxey is a young Black man from Decatur, Georgia with a great gift. He offers sign language interpretation specifically for Black communities. This may seem niche, but consider this. Say a Black deaf person wants to attend a rap concert. The rapper is performing and the

crowd is feeling beautiful energy. The Black deaf person in attendance needs to experience the energy too, so Maxey signs as someone who has the technical and cultural foundation to translate. As a writeup in GQ magazine offered, many people want to “interpret hip-hop music, but they don’t know the culture. They don’t know the slang.” How does one interpret complex rap music that relies heavily on artistic hyperbole and double entendres? Maxey is able to discern which words make sense in which context.

Maxey started an organization called ***Deafinitely Dope***, a project that aims to link artists and Black ASL music interpreters. He had felt like he was “too deaf to be hearing, and too hearing to be deaf.” And yet, that middle space he occupies makes his work even that much more powerful. He is able to cross between communities and translate for so many. As on the day of Pentecost, God is glorified when all can experience the message in their own language. Whether it’s sign language, Spanish or something else. God empowers people in our communities to help translate. This is holy work.

**Journal:** Peter quotes Joel. In these days, God will pour out God’s Spirit on ***all*** flesh. Young, old (and everyone else). Male, female (and everyone else). Free and enslaved (and anyone else). How would you describe your flesh? Do you see God here?

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Closing: Sing “**Sweet, Sweet Spirit.**”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHbyJo3afPo>

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,  
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;  
There are sweet expressions on each face,  
And I know that it's the presence of the Lord.

Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove,  
Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.  
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;  
Without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived,  
When we shall leave this place.

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

You are the God who can send miracles. You help us to see each other with fresh eyes, ears and hearts. You make it possible that we can understand each other even when we are trying to make it through phone calls and conference dial-ins.

We need your Spirit. We need to remember the care you gave to all flesh. We have to remember that every single one of us is valued by your Spirit. Not because of who we are or what we have. We are valued because you knew us before we even arrived here.

Strengthen us. Convict us when we keep people out. Comfort us when we are the ones being left out. Keep our eyes on you and our hand to the plow.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

**Works Cited**

<https://www.gq.com/story/chance-the-rapper-sign-language-deafinitely-dope>

<https://www.deafinitelydope.org/team-member/matt-maxey/>