Spirit of Witness

At the time of Jesus' ascension, Jesus promises that the Spirit will continue to shape the disciples as the Body of Christ. This community is commissioned to do the work of Christ "to the ends of the earth." A time of prayer prepares disciples for their lives as witnesses to the saving love of God.

June 5, 2011

Focus Scripture
Acts 1:6–14

Additional Scriptures
Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35
1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11
John 17:1–11

Be with us, O Spirit, and form us as witnesses to the love of God in Christ. Grace us with your power, so that we may embody this love for those who long for the gift of presence, the hope of acceptance, and the mercy of compassion. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Focus Scripture: Acts 1:6–14

Acts is traditionally ascribed to the same author as Luke; it is also addressed to "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Acts picks up the story where Luke leaves off, as the writer recounts Jesus' appearances and words to the disciples after the Resurrection.

"Is this the time?" (Acts 1:6) In their final meeting with Jesus, the disciples wonder when "you will restore the kingdom." The Greek word translated "kingdom" or "kingdom of God" does not indicate a territory with boundaries, rather a sense of divine rule. Disciples of every age have wondered when Christ will usher in this promised and ultimate reign of God. Jesus' reply holds: "It is not for you to know" (v. 7).

In Acts, the story begins in Jerusalem and unfolds as the gospel message of God's saving love spreads to Judea, Samaria, and finally to Rome. Jesus' promise to the disciples that they will receive the power of the Spirit for witness (v. 8) explains how this will occur. When Jesus is no longer at home on earth, God's Spirit forms and commissions the Body of Christ to do the work of Christ.

In reporting the account of Jesus' ascension, Acts say only that Jesus is "lifted up" into a cloud. A cloud has signified God's presence in other biblical texts; two figures dressed in white indicate "heavenly messengers."

From this point forward, the story in Acts focuses on the community of disciples. The interim between Jesus' ascension and the gift of Spirit that is given at Pentecost is a time of pausing for prayer and reflection. The group of disciples – numbered in Acts 1:15 as "about one hundred twenty persons" – is a community of prayer that embodies God's grace and love.

This community practices inclusion. The eleven disciples are joined by the brothers of Jesus and "certain women," including Mary the mother of Jesus. The first disciple in Luke – the first person to proclaim faith in God's saving action – was Mary. Her commitment in Luke 1:38, "Let it be with me according to your word," had opened the world to God's grace made manifest in Christ. Now, as the early followers begin to move out in the spirit of witness, Mary once more stands at the beginning.

This waiting community of prayer is the community for whom Jesus prays before his trial, as told in **John 17:1–11**. Jesus prays for the community of disciples, with the promise that God will be glorified in their spirit of witness.

In **Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35**, in the imagery of sky and cloud, the psalmist reiterates the promise that God will give power and strength to God's people, and abide with those who are most vulnerable.

The absence of Jesus generated some anxiety in the early Christian community. In **1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11**, the writer addresses the fears that faced one such group. Yet, the letter proclaims that God is to be trusted and that suffering is shared with Christ. The closing verse asserts that all power resides in the God of grace, enabling our spirit of witness.

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Jesus promises "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). This power speaks of the new choices, actions, voice, and values that will come into the world through the spirit of witness of Jesus' followers. When has this Spirit-filled power evoked a sense of awe in your life? When has it evoked a sense of fear? For what is your church praying and preparing today?

The Focus for Ages 5–12

In an age where instant gratification rules, what do you think waiting means for the children in your group? Time has little meaning for the 5-year-olds, but the 12-year-olds will be more aware of being on time and being asked to postpone an anticipated event. Listen carefully to their conversation in Connect to learn more about this generation of children.

Prayer is a vital way to relate to God for anyone, children too. In this session, several options to enhance their practice of prayer are suggested, especially in the Respond zones. Think about the children. You know them pretty well by now. How might you encourage each one to participate in a zone that will help them grow in the practice of prayer?

Pray that the children in your group discover the importance of prayer, alone or with others, in nurturing their faith.

June 5, 2011

Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Acts 1:6–14, and biblical background material (p. 99). How do you handle waiting?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see "This Season, So…" on p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 9* and *CD player. Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from www.spiritseasons.com.
- ❑ Bring *songs "Alleluia"* and *"I Send You Out"* (pp. 1 and 10–12 in *Music Section*, also #8 and #23 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *white or gold cloth, pillar candle, matches, offering basket,* and *Bible.* Place *bookmark* at John.
- ❑ Bring *Easter gather words* (p. 116).

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet "Now What?"*
- ❑ Bring *poster "Seed Sun."*
- ❑ For remembering Jesus group, *card stock/heavy paper* the size of postcards on which you have printed these words: donkey (*Palm Sunday*), thirty pieces of silver (*Judas' betrayal*), bread (*last supper or disciples on road to Emmaus*), cross (*crucifixion*), empty tomb (*women finding the empty tomb*), locked door (*Jesus' appearance in Jerusalem*).
- ❑ For Bible discussion group, bring *poster "On the Road," copies of today's resource sheet "Praying Together,"* and *directions* (p. 102).

Respond

- ❑ **Outreach zone:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Prayer Chain"* and *directions* (p. 102). Prepare two links to begin prayer chain.
- ❑ **Art zone:** *construction paper* (many colours), length of *rope* or *heavy twine*, and (optional) *hole punch* and *ribbon* or *yarn*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song "The Peace of the Earth"* (p. 9 in *Music Section*, also #10 on *Seasons Music CD*)
- ❑ Surprise zone: *basket*

Bless

- ❑ Bring *song "Strength for the Journey"* (pp. 2–4 in *Music Section*, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Spirit of Witness

Scripture

Acts 1:6–14

FOCUS **To pray and wait with Jesus' followers.**

1 GATHER

Welcome Greet the children as they arrive. Welcome children who have been absent or who are new. Introduce yourself to new children and them to the group. Invite everyone to join you at the worship table.

Song Light the pillar candle, noting that this is the Christ candle. Play the song "Alleluia" (p. 1 in *Music Section*, also #8 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to sing it with you. During the song, have a child receive the offering.

Litany Lead the group in the Easter gather words (p. 116).

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

Connecting with the focus

Waiting Invite the children to think about what they do when they have to wait for something. Ask:

- **When it is a month before school is out, what do you do as you wait?**
- **When it is a week until your birthday, what do you do as you wait?**
- **When you are hungry and you are told, "No snack now, it's just an hour before we eat," what do you do as you wait?**

Enjoy their conversation and encourage them to name other times when they have to wait. Then explain that the followers of Jesus had to wait too.

2 ENGAGE

Preparing for the story

Have a child bring the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Ask:

- **What book is our story from?**

The children have heard other stories from Acts: the story of Stephen and the story about how the early church lived together. Review these two stories with them. Be sure they understand that the stories in the book of Acts took place after the resurrection of Jesus.

Back to Acts Tell the story on today's resource sheet "Now What?" that is based on **Acts 1:6–14**. After the story, show the children the poster *Seed Sun*. Ask them to imagine that they are with the disciples on the Mount of Olives where the story took place. Jesus is no longer with them; and the angels have come and gone. They are standing close together like the seeds in this photograph. Ask:

- **What do you imagine you and the disciples are saying?**

The Bible story

Exploring the story further To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

Remembering Jesus group The disciples returned to Jerusalem to pray and remember Jesus. Spread the prepared cards (see Prepare), face down. Invite a child to select one card and read it aloud, or read it for the child. Then ask the group to tell how this word helps them remember Jesus or a story Jesus told. Give additional clues if the children need more help. Do as many words as you can until the other group is ready.

Bible discussion group This group will continue to probe the question, "What do you imagine the disciples are saying?" They will also explore what the disciples did. Display the poster *On the Road* where the children in this group can examine it. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Praying Together," Bibles, and these directions:

1 Take a copy of "Praying Together" and a Bible.
2 Find Acts 1 in your Bible. Keep it open as you look at the poster *On the Road*.
3 Now look at "Praying Together." Take turns reading the speeches in the balloons.
4 Look at the poster again and imagine these three people saying these words.
5 Now read "Something to talk about" on "Praying Together." Talk about the questions there.

The Bible story and us

Play the song "I Send You Out" (pp. 10–12 in *Music Section*, also #23 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal for the children to gather together. If there are words left in the remembering Jesus group, show them one at a time for the whole group to remember Jesus. Then ask:

- **As the church today continues the work and way of Jesus in the world, what helps us to do this?**

If the children do not mention prayer, suggest it before moving to the Respond zones.

3 RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Prayer litany** The followers of Jesus prayed together as they waited for the gift of God's Spirit. Prayer continues to be an important way that we relate to God. While our individual prayers are important, our prayer life together reminds us of needs around the world and helps us set priorities. Begin by making a list of concerns on newsprint. Encourage the children to think of others in the congregation, the community, and elsewhere in the world. In a prayer litany, a concern is spoken and the group responds. The response can be something like, "We pray for peace throughout the world." Print the response on newsprint. Lead the children in this zone in a prayer, incorporating some of the concerns on the list. Then have the group select three or four concerns to include in the prayer in Bless.

  Perhaps the group can give this prayer to the worship leaders to include in the service of worship or publish it in the church newsletter.

- ❑ **Quiet zone: Prayer chain** Prayer names our concerns to God, but prayer also reminds us that we are not alone. Prepare a sample of two links so the children will have a chain to which they can add their links. Children can create papers to add to the prayer chain. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Prayer Chain," pencils, scissors, stapler, and the following directions:

1 Take a copy of "Prayer Chain" and a pencil.
2 Prayer connects us to God and the world around us. Prayer helps us remember that Jesus told us that we are not alone because the Spirit of God is with us.
3 Write your prayer wishes in the rectangles.
4 Fold each one in half lengthwise.
5 Put one prayer through the last link on the prayer chain. Then staple your link together.
6 Add your second link in the same way.

- ❑ **Art zone: Prayer pennants** A row of prayer pennants can call us to prayer as well as broaden our prayer concerns. You will need a length of rope or strong twine strung between two points in the learning area on which the children can hang their pennants. Prepare colourful construction paper pennants, ready for the children to draw or write their prayer concerns on. Attach them to the rope with tape, or punch holes in the wide end of the pennant and string yarn or ribbon through the holes to tie it to the rope.

- **Music zone: Musical reminder** The song "Strength for the Journey" (pp. 2–4 in *Music Section*, also #9 in *Seasons Music CD*) is a song with a call and assurance. Play the song for the children. Then teach them the simple refrain, which is based on "I will be strength for the journey." Ask:
  - **Why might the followers of Jesus in the story from Acts have found these words comforting or helpful?**

  After the children have thought about the early followers, ask:
  - **How might this song be helpful or comforting to Jesus' followers today?**

  Then sing the refrain again.

- **Surprise zone: Praying for others** Praying for one another has long been a practice of God's people. This activity will encourage the children (and leaders) to pray for someone else in the group during the coming week. Give each child a half-sheet of paper and a pencil. Have the children write one or two prayer concerns on the papers, but they do not sign their papers. Fold them in half and place in a basket. Each child will draw one paper in Bless to take home and pray during the coming week.

Gather Play "I Send You Out" (pp. 10–12 in *Music Section*, also #23 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather in a circle around the worship table.

Sing the song "Strength for the Journey" (pp. 2-4 in *Music Section*, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Pray the prayer litany from the outreach zone, or one of your own.

Prayers for others Explain the plan for praying for others during the week. Have each child take a paper from the basket.

Blessing To a child next to you, say, "(*Child's name*), God hears your prayers." Continue the blessing until each child and leader has been blessed.

This session focused on the praying that Jesus' followers did as they waited in Jerusalem. What did you discover about the prayer life of the children in your group? How might you incorporate their prayers in future sessions?

What did you learn about prayer as you prepared and led this session? How might this knowledge enrich your prayer life?

The Pentecost session for next week is designed for a group of all ages. If you will be meeting with a multiage group, look over this session early in the week and decide how you will adapt it. It includes suggestions for groups of children as well as all ages.

Now What?

based on Acts 1:6–14

Rehearse this brief story so you can tell it in your own words.

After Jesus died, his friends and followers saw him alive again in a new way in many places. Remember when he suddenly appeared in the locked room where the disciples were? Remember when he appeared to Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus? While Jesus was still with them, they were eager to know what would happen when Jesus left them.

The twelve asked Jesus, "Are you going to be the king of Israel now?"

Jesus may have been tired of their questions, but he was patient with his friends. "You don't need to know what God is going to do when. The Holy Spirit will come one day and be with you. Then you can tell everyone everywhere all about me."

After Jesus said this and while the followers were thinking about Jesus' answer, Jesus was taken up into a cloud. They kept looking up at the sky, even though they couldn't see Jesus anymore.

While they were standing there, two dazzling angels stood with them. What a surprise! "Why are you looking to the sky? Jesus is gone."

"Now what?" they said to one another. "Now what are we supposed to do?"

They had many questions.
"What do we do now?"
"Where should we go?"
"When will Jesus come back?"
"When will the Holy Spirit come to us?"
"Now what?"

Still puzzled, the twelve and some of the women, including the mother of Jesus, went into Jerusalem to the room where they had been staying. There they prayed together.

Praying Together

"We've been waiting for ever! Jesus told us to go into the world to tell his story. Shouldn't we be doing that by now?"

"We have to wait! Jesus told us not to leave Jerusalem until we had been baptized with the Holy Spirit."

"What if we have been baptized already? Suppose it's already happened and we haven't realized it? How are we supposed to know what being baptized with the Holy Spirit feels like? I feel kind of different!"

"I'm bored of waiting. I want to do something NOW!"

"Let's pray together. Jesus always prayed before he did anything important. It's better than sitting here doing nothing."

Something to talk about

Have you ever had to wait for something amazing to happen? You know it's going to happen soon, but it just takes forever for the day to come. That's the feeling the followers of Jesus probably had. Jesus had promised that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and they were waiting for that to happen.

- **If you were one of Jesus' followers, what would you be thinking and feeling?**

The writer of the book of Acts records that while they waited, the followers of Jesus often gathered together to pray (see Acts 1:14).

- **Why do you think they gathered to pray?**
- **How might praying together help them in the waiting?**

Prayer Chain

A prayer wish I have for a friend or my family is...

Gather Rituals

Lenten gathering litany

(*Place the purple cloth on the worship table.*)

One: During Lent we think deeply about God and how we are living in God's ways.

All: And God is with us.

(*Place the purple ribbon as a path across the cloth on the table.*)

One: As we move through Lent, we ask questions of God and of ourselves.

All: And God is with us.

(*Place six stones on the purple ribbon.*)

One: During Lent, we hear and explore stories of journey, close relationship with God, challenge and opportunities, needs met, and strength.

All: And God is with us.

(*Place six votive candles on the purple ribbon and light them.*)

One: With every question and every story, we learn more about God and God's ways.

All: And God is with us.

Easter gather words

In the Easter season, we celebrate Jesus alive in a new way.

(Invite the children to repeat each line after you.)

Together we show Jesus' love
to each other
And show Jesus' love
to the world.
We gather in love
to be the church.