



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost (A)
May 28, 2023

**[RCL] Acts 2:1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21;
John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39**

Numbers 11:24-30

It is an unsettling thought for Joshua to think that God's message might come out of someone random, someone surprising, people like Medad or Eldad, people we never hear about anywhere else in the Bible. Joshua seemed to fear the idea that people other than Moses could come so close to God that God would be able to speak through their voices and lives.

But in the verses before this passage begins, Moses is pleading with God for help with the people. Moses knew he needed help from his people, and so did God. We need each other to speak with God's voice; we will hear the Spirit's movement in surprising places.

- When has the Spirit spoken to you from a surprising place?
- How can you be open to God's message to you coming from surprising places (or people)?

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Not long ago, when I was able to go on a whale-watching tour, I felt like I was eavesdropping on someone else's prayer. You see the blow, the column of moisture spraying out of the whale's blowhole, and you hear the husky breath of the whale. You see the dark, smooth, serpentine movement of the whale coming out of the surface of the water, the dorsal fin appears, and then it disappears. Slowly, out of the water rises the big, beautiful fluke of the whale, with shining water dripping from it, and then it sinks slowly under the surface. The whale is using this movement with the fluke in the air to propel a powerful dive, deep into the sea, below the boat.

I think of Psalm 104, and what this powerful, playful display of the whale tells about God. What wisdom, what creativity, to design a creature such as the whale. Verse 27 says, "There is that Leviathan, which you have made for the sport of it." The word "Leviathan" probably refers to a mythical sea monster, but the closest I've seen to that is a whale. And now I know what it looks like when God has fun. To see the whale in its glory is coming closer to seeing God in God's glory, just as it is seeing anyone else being who they are made to be. And the relieving thing about the whale (and God) is that it has nothing to do with me. I was able to simply sit without interfering and watch the prayer of the whales, and the reciprocal delight of God.

- When have you eavesdropped on the prayers of creation?

- What does the creation around you have to tell you about the Spirit who creates and renews the face of the earth?

Acts 2:1-21

In Acts, as in the reading from Numbers, there seems to be a direct connection between the Spirit and the act of prophesying. Prophesying comes from being in direct contact with the Spirit of God. It is a speech act that is the result of God's movement, of the pouring out of God's Spirit.

But Acts tells us something crucial here. This Spirit-fueled speech act is one that is meant to bring people in; it gathers and embraces. It empowers people to speak of God's power not only in a way that others can hear but in the languages of their hearts. The Holy Spirit gives the power of prophecy in order to traverse boundaries.

Peter reminds the people of the prophet Joel's words, that God would pour out God's Spirit "upon all flesh." God's dream is for all creatures to be moved by the Spirit such that we would be able to speak—and listen—across language and cultural differences, about the glory of God.

- When have you been caught up by the Holy Spirit?
- How have you seen the Spirit act to dissipate destructive division and gather people together?
- How can the Spirit use you to participate in this ingathering?

John 7:37-39

Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me." It is not belief that begins the inquiry, the searching; it is thirst. Our thirst propels us toward Jesus, but it is our belief that causes us to drink. Note: the belief follows the thirst, the searching, and the encounter.

The believer, compelled by their encounter with Christ, drinks. And then afterward, "out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." This living water is the Holy Spirit, flowing out from us, for the sake of the thirst of others. We are called to thirst, to search, to encounter, to believe, to drink, and then, to nourish others with God's own Spirit. This is a Trinitarian dance we move in and out of throughout this life.

- Are you in a moment of searching, encountering, believing, drinking, or nourishing others?

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