



## Introduction to the Course

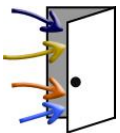
What is 'our' story? As individuals we have a personal life story, as families, as churches, as parishes, as deaneries, as diocese, as communions and denominations. But we have no story without the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His story is our reference point as disciples for living. His story is the deep well from which we drink to make meaning and give meaning as we share the gift of life. 'Our' story not only springs from his: it is through his eyes that we read the scriptures, seeking to interpret the passion and resurrection. This Lent we use Acts 1 and 2 to see what we can learn.

*But wait a minute! How do we prepare for Easter through Lent by learning about the disciples' experience of the Ascension and Pentecost? Isn't that back to front?* Yes it is back to front, but actually this is how we always do it. We are always an Easter and Pentecost people looking back at our life-giving story. We have a foot in both Lent and Pentecost. This Lent course enters into the life of the raw and electrified witnesses to the passion and resurrection. They looked to their experiences with Jesus and their scriptures to make sense of who they were and what they were now doing.

'Their' story begins with 'waiting' Acts 1.1-11, then 'preparing' Acts 1.12-26, 'receiving' Acts 2.1-13, 'Telling' Acts 2.14-36, and finally 'living' Acts 2.37-47. They are living the story of the Risen Christ, nurtured by his word as they follow his leading. As we share in their story it becomes ours. As we move through the journey of Lent to the cross, we see the cross and resurrection 'from the other side'.

Key to 'their' story and 'ours', is encountering God in the scriptures and allowing the Word he speaks to change us. We will listen and pray the Scriptures, mainly using a method called *Lectio Divina*, which dates back to the 6th century Benedictine tradition but which has roots even older. *Lectio divina* is a tool for reading the scriptures that is being rediscovered, largely because it allows each one of us, however much we know about the scriptures, to respond at a deeper level to what we hear - for us. As a tool it is complementary to Bible study, with an emphasis more on what we 'hear' than what the text means historically. Bishop Trevor wrote in his introductory letter that this Lent course might 'stretch our capacity to use the scriptures more imaginatively and confidently within our communities. This is not so much a study about the Bible, but a course to enthuse us about how we use the Bible.'

The four stages of each session are:



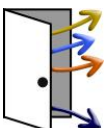
**Entering** - This is the introductory part of the session, where we consciously enter into each other's presence and into that of the God who promised to be among us when we gather in his name.



**Encountering** - This is the part of the evening where we openly listen together to scripture by doing *Lectio Divina*.



**Exploring** - This is where we follow questions that build on our lectio and seek to understand the disciples perspectives on Christ's death and resurrection



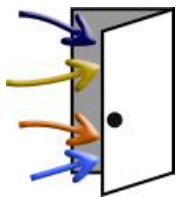
**Engaging** - Having encountered God and explored the word with others; as the early church would have done, we listen and use the scriptures as a springboard to prayer and action.



## Session One – Acts 1.1–11 Waiting

The aims of this session are to think about the idea of 'waiting' upon scripture.

- How we wait within uncertain places for what comes next
- How we wait upon God's word and for his Holy Spirit
- How we wait with others and listen for God together.



### 1. Entering

Share experiences of waiting for 'good' things and 'not so good things'. What is similar and different about both types of waiting?

Take turns saying something about a favourite copy of a Bible or way of reading the Bible that you find helpful.

What are your hopes for this group as you journey through Lent?

Background:

Over the next 5 weeks we will be looking at texts from the first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. We'll be reflecting on how the first church community read their scriptures, how they looked back, as we do during Lent, on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and how we might follow their example in both reading and praying the scriptures. We will also seek to encounter God together through a method of Bible reading called *lectio divina* (divine reading), and to explore how what we hear together might be lived out in the life of our church.

The Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke who also authored the Gospel named after him. The Gospel is about the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah (Christ), the Acts is about the life and the ministry of the (early) church of Jesus Christ. Sometimes this book is informally called 'The Acts of the Spirit' due to the preponderance of references to the Holy Spirit (52 times in total), especially in the first few chapters.

After a time of quiet to focus on God, you could use this or another prayer:

**Christ, whose insistent call disturbs our settled lives:  
give us discernment to hear your word,  
grace to relinquish our tasks,  
and courage to follow empty-handed  
wherever you may lead;  
that the voice of the gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth. Amen.**



## 2. Encountering

Background: *Lectio divina*

*Lectio* is slow reading. One reads slowly enough to utter and hear at the same time. As you read, listen. As you listen, read. As you listen and read, hear. When Jesus told the parable of the Sower he concluded by saying that some seed '...fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.' As he said this, he called out, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' (Lk 8.8)

Taking verses in turns, read Acts 1.1-11 **as if for the very first time**.

Tell the rest of the group about a word or a phrase which struck you, or which you had never quite noticed before...

Read the passage again, and this time **listen for a word of Christ to you**; share together...

Read the passage for a third time, and be attentive to **a word from Christ that calls you to act**; share together...

Note down anything which feels significant from what you have heard together.



## 3. Exploring

Read Acts 1.1-3.

Jesus used this time with the apostles to help understand the meaning of his death and resurrection. One imagines that as on the Emmaus road (Luke 24.7) Jesus 'beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures'.

If we imagine Jesus weaving a narrative or story with the Old Testament scriptures and his life events, what would some of the strands have been?

Why would this have been important for the apostles to listen to and engage with?

What kind of questions do you think the apostles might have asked Jesus during this time?

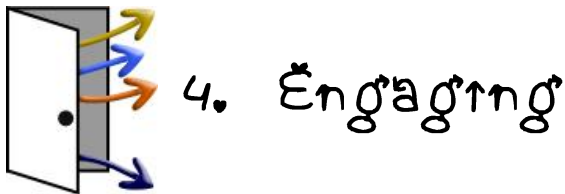
What would you have asked?

Why do you think that Luke has done such careful research before writing 'an orderly account.'? Why do you think he felt this was important?

Reflect on the significant things you heard through the *lectio divina*.

Is there anything in your encounter with God that you need to take forward?

How are you going to do that?



What are you going actually to do differently as a result of what you have heard in this session? How might your church communities respond to what God has said?

Each session will close with a different way of praying the scriptures. This time we'll use this 'waiting' psalm. You may like to pray it altogether, or use the leader/**congregation** format.

Even though you might not be alone when you say this Psalm, you might feel 'alone' as a group or church. Before you begin you might consider together how you think your church or group is in a posture of 'waiting'.

#### **Psalm 62**

<sup>1</sup> For God alone my soul waits in silence;  
from him comes my salvation.

<sup>2</sup> **He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.**

<sup>3</sup> How long will you assail a person,  
will you batter your victim, all of you,  
as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence?

<sup>4</sup> **Their only plan is to bring down a person of prominence.  
They take pleasure in falsehood;  
they bless with their mouths,  
but inwardly they curse.**

<sup>5</sup> For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from him.

<sup>6</sup> **He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.**

<sup>7</sup> On God rests my deliverance and my honour;  
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

<sup>8</sup> **Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him;  
God is a refuge for us.**

<sup>9</sup> Those of low estate are but a breath,  
those of high estate are a delusion;  
in the balances they go up;  
they are together lighter than a breath.

<sup>10</sup> **Put no confidence in extortion,  
and set no vain hopes on robbery;  
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.**

<sup>11</sup> Once God has spoken;  
twice have I heard this:  
that power belongs to God,

<sup>12</sup> **and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.  
For you repay to all according to their work**

You could also use this poem, and perhaps a song or some music, for meditation:

### **Ascension**

Salute the last, and everlasting day,  
joy at the uprising of this Sun, and Son,  
ye whose true tears, or tribulation  
have purely wash'd, or burnt your drossy clay.  
Behold, the Highest, parting hence away,  
lightens the dark clouds, which He treads upon;  
nor doth he by ascending show alone,  
but first He, and He first enters the way.  
O strong Ram, which hast batter'd heaven for me!  
Mild lamb, which with Thy Blood hast mark'd the path!  
Bright Torch, which shinest, that I the way may see!  
O, with Thy own Blood quench Thy own just wrath;  
and if Thy Holy Spirit my Muse did raise,  
deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise.                      John Donne

A closing prayer:

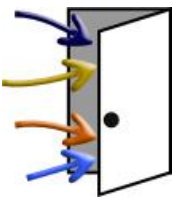
**God our Father,  
the good news of the death and rising of your Son  
filled your apostles with hope  
and inspired them to prayerful waiting  
and radical action.  
As we enter into this story  
and wait for your Spirit  
breathe into us a deep love for you and your words  
and equip us for action in his name. Amen.**



## Session Two – Acts 1: 12–26 Preparing

The aim of this session is to consider:

- how the Apostles prepared themselves to carry out the mission Jesus gave them
- how we are prepared for witness and mission



### 1. Entering

Share examples of how to 'prepare' for an event that features in your life at present.

How do you judge the quality of your preparations?

What kind of preparations will your church need to make for Easter?

How might you prepare 'yourself' for Easter?

Use this or another prayer to focus on God and his loving presence with you:

We give thanks to you, God our Father,  
for mercy that reaches out,  
for patience that waits our returning,  
and for your love that is ever ready  
to welcome sinners.

**We praise you that in Christ Jesus  
you meet us with grace, embrace us  
in acceptance, and affirm us as  
citizens of a forgiven universe.**

We give thanks to you that by your  
Holy Spirit you move us to change  
direction, receive your love,  
and become what we most truly are.

In darkness and in light, in trouble  
and in joy, help us then, O God,  
to accept your forgiveness, to believe  
your love, and to trust your purpose.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Terry C. Falla



## 2. Encountering

Background: *Lectio divina*

The Carmelites say that *Lectio* is 'a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us.' Of course we always bring our 'agenda' to our reading, and praying, and worship. Sometimes these are our cares, or hopes, or fears. So when we participate in *lectio divina* we consciously attend to the biblical passage before us with the hope and prayer that the God of the Scriptures knows and cares about these things, and holds our concerns in the divine self.

Taking verses in turns, read Acts 1.12-26 **as if for the very first time**.

Share together **a word or a phrase which struck you**, or which you had never quite noticed before...

Read the passage again, and this time, **listen for a word of Christ to you**; share together...

Read the passage for a third time, and be attentive to **a word from Christ that calls you to act**; share together...

Note down anything which feels significant from what you have heard together.



## 3. Exploring

Following their tumultuous 40 days after the resurrection, the disciples were with Jesus as he taught them (v3) about the significance of all that was happening and prepared them for becoming the Spirit empowered church.

For these 40 days of Lent how is God preparing us through the gift of his word for the glorious mystery of his death and resurrection?

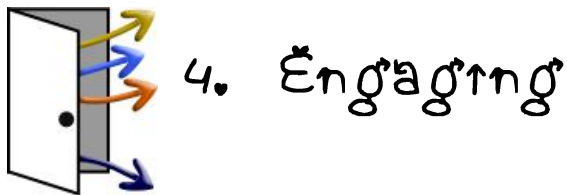
Is there anything significant which came out of your *lectio divina* which might help?



The story of replacing Judas has significance for the early Christian community. Somehow the 'complete' set of 12 leaders was an important scriptural fulfilment- it makes a difference for the preparedness of the church for the coming of the Spirit. They prayed for a new apostle who was a 'companion of Jesus'. How might this criterion help us select leaders?

The ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost found the disciples engaged in frequent prayer. Where does prayer feature in our personal preparedness for the future?  
For our churches preparedness for the future?

How is God preparing us and our churches to become witnesses of the Spirit today?



We are constantly being prepared by God for our service to him. The scriptures nourish us for life's journey in ways we do not always see. We very often understand this preparation- if we ever do- only in hindsight. In Colossians 1.3-14 (CEV) we see how Paul gives thanks and prays for that church. Read the passage responsorially, ask group members to note what Paul prays and yearns for in the church in Colossae.

We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.  
**We've done this since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all God's people.**

You have this faith and love because of the hope reserved for you in heaven.  
**You previously heard about this hope through the true message, the good news, which has come to you.**

This message has been bearing fruit and growing among you since the day you heard and truly understood God's grace,  
**in the same way that it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world.**

You learned it from Epaphras, who is the fellow slave we love and Christ's faithful minister for your sake.  
**He informed us of your love in the Spirit.**

Because of this, since the day we heard about you, we haven't stopped praying for you and asking for you to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding.  
**We're praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way:**

by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God;  
**by being strengthened through his glorious might so that you may be prepared to endure everything and have patience, and by giving thanks with joy to the Father.**

He made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy people.  
**He rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins.**

Share what you have noted and then list three or four prayer 'yearnings' that you would want to pray for your church through Lent. Find a way of remembering these together for the next weeks and praying them now.



You might like to use this poem and/or a song for meditation

### **The Ballad of the Judas Tree**

In Hell there grew a Judas Tree  
Where Judas hanged and died  
Because he could not bear to see  
His master crucified

Our Lord descended into Hell  
And found his Judas there  
For ever hanging on the tree  
Grown from his own despair

So Jesus cut his Judas down  
And took him in his arms  
"It was for this I came" he said  
"And not to do you harm

My Father gave me twelve good men  
And all of them I kept  
Though one betrayed and one denied  
Some fled and others slept

In three days' time I must return  
To make the others glad  
But first I had to come to Hell  
And share the death you had

My tree will grow in place of yours  
Its roots lie here as well  
There is no final victory  
Without this soul from Hell"

So when we all condemned him  
As of every traitor worst  
Remember that of all his men  
Our Lord forgave him first

D. Ruth Etchells

A concluding prayer:

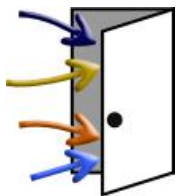
**God our Father,  
your Son Jesus Christ promised that through his Spirit  
we would be prepared to be his witnesses.  
Keep us patient in waiting and faithful in prayer,  
that we may receive his promise  
and fulfil our calling.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



## Session Three – Acts 2: 1–13 Receiving

The aim of this session is to think about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and:

- how the first disciples experienced the Spirit.
- how the coming of the Spirit transforms believers into witnesses.



### 1. Entering

Today's story is essentially about the disciples *experiencing* God in an unexpected way.

Share your experience of an 'unexpected' happening while with a large group of people.

What were your first thoughts as something happened?

How did you and those present attempt to make sense of it afterwards?

Can anyone in the group share a personal example of something they unexpectedly experienced of God and how they have sought to understand it? Has that understanding changed over time?

Use this or another prayer to open yourselves to God and what he might have for you today:

God of unity,

**draw us together.**

God of wind,

**blow away our preconceptions.**

God of fire,

**ignite our hearts with love for you.**

God of words,

**fill our mouths with your praises.**

God of power,

**demonstrate through our lives your saving love.**

God who calls us,

**fill us and send us. Amen.**



## 2. Encountering

Background: *Lectio divina*

*Lectio* 'is meant to be a conversation with God about one's life' (Charlotte Allen). So as we read the passage of Scripture become aware that we are entering into a conversation - this is a way of speaking and listening to and with God about oneself.

Taking verses in turns, read Acts 2.1-13 **as if for the very first time**.

Share together a word or a phrase which struck you, or which you had never quite noticed before...

Read the passage again, and this time, **listen for a word of Christ to you**; share together...

Read the passage for a third time, and be attentive to **a word from Christ that calls you to act**; share together...

Note down anything which feels significant from what you have heard together.



## 3. Exploring

Christians today are often equally 'amazed and perplexed' when they hear the Pentecost story. How do you read it?

Next session we'll be hearing how Peter explained from the scriptures what had happened to them. During this session we will explore the account from Luke's perspective. How was the Spirit received?

Interestingly it is the Holy Spirit who 'drives' (Mark 1.12) or 'leads' (Matthew 4.1) Jesus to the desert to be tempted, and ultimately to Jerusalem to be killed. The same Spirit now drives the Apostles out of their houses and onto the streets with the good news.

What is your experience of the church being 'driven' or 'led'?

What can we apply to our decision making in Christian communities?

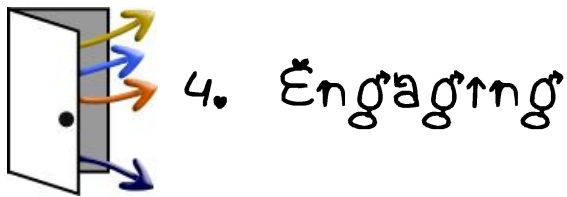
Jesus said in Acts 1.8 '*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*'

Receiving the gift of the Spirit set the disciples of Jesus apart from their fellow Jews and propelled the Christian mission beyond the borders of Israel. This gift led to a strong reaction by onlookers- it led to them being mocked and sneered at (and later imprisoned, beaten and killed).

Are we a people receptive to the Spirit? How does being receptive to the Spirit work?

How might the Holy Spirit be energizing the church today, and what might be the consequences of receiving the Spirit afresh?

Is there anything significant which came out of your *lectio* which might help?



Try using a Bible breathing-prayer. Each choose a prayer verse which falls easily into two halves and follow the instructions below.

For example:

from Acts 2.4            'They were filled with the Holy Spirit,  
and began to speak.'

or, from Acts 1:8        'You will receive power,  
and you will be my witnesses.'

or, from Psalm 51:10 'Create in me a clean heart,  
renew a steadfast spirit within me'

Spend a few minutes using your prayer, breathing in during the first line, and out during the second. Try to get in touch with the inward flow, as if it is the flow of God's Spirit and power into you. Imagine the outward flow, as if it is God's Spirit flowing from you to the world around. After the prayer, spend a brief time in silence. Give the group an opportunity if they want to share anything that emerged during the prayer.

Alternatively the group might want to agree a verse and all use it together.

The classic breathing prayer is what is known as the 'Jesus prayer' in the Orthodox tradition

Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
have mercy on me, a sinner.

but it can be helpful to find your own words and use them often through the day.

Could you all commit to spending five minutes each day this coming week as part of a Lenten discipline to use your breathing prayers, seeking a new filling of God's Holy Spirit as you prepare for Easter?

You might like to use this poem for a meditation:

**I asked the Lord**

I asked the Lord  
for a bunch of fresh flowers  
but instead he gave me an ugly cactus  
with many thorns.

I asked the Lord  
for some beautiful butterflies  
but instead he gave me  
many ugly and dreadful worms.

I was threatened,  
I was disappointed,  
I mourned.  
But after many days,  
suddenly,  
I saw the cactus bloom  
with many beautiful flowers,  
and those worms became beautiful butterflies  
flying in the spring wind.  
God's way is the best way.

Chun-Ming Kao, written from prison

A concluding prayer:

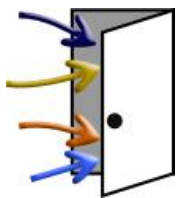
**God our Father,  
your Holy Spirit interrupted the apostles' prayer  
and blew them out onto the streets  
to proclaim the words and works of God.  
May we your children so know your power  
and so love your words  
that the world may be turned upside down,  
and many come to know your love for themselves.  
Amen.**



## Session Four – Acts 2: 14–36 Telling

The aim of this session is to hear again Peter's great Pentecost sermon:

- reflecting on Peter's witness.
- thinking about the interpretation of the Bible in the journey of faith.
- considering the application of the Bible in Christian witness



### 1. Entering

Can you think of a really significant sermon or talk you have heard, perhaps something which 'cut you to the heart'? Share it with the group, and why you think it had such an effect on you.

Take some time to open yourself to the Spirit of God, welcoming him to do whatever he wants among you. You may want to include this or another prayer:

O God the Holy Ghost  
 Who art light unto thine elect  
 Evermore enlighten us.  
 Thou who art fire of love  
 Evermore enkindle us.  
 Thou who art Lord and Giver of Life,  
 Evermore live in us.  
 Thou who bestowest sevenfold grace,  
 Evermore replenish us.  
 As the wind is thy symbol,  
 So forward our goings.  
 As the dove, so launch us heavenwards.  
 As water, so purify our spirits.  
 As a cloud, so abate our temptations.  
 As dew, so revive our languor.  
 As fire, so purge our dross.

Christina Georgina Rossetti



## 2. Encountering

Background: *Lectio divina*

*Lectio divina* means 'divine reading': we read to promote communion with God, and with the Word of God. It is thus a prayerful way of reading as it acknowledges that we read to hear God, we read with the assistance of the Spirit of God, and we read to understand the person of the Son of God. This form of reading is expectant, we believe that in our reading we will encounter God's Word in the word of God.

Taking verses in turns, read Acts 2: 14-36 (or a portion of it) **as if for the very first time**.

Share together a word or a phrase which struck you, or which you had never quite noticed before...

Read the passage again, and this time, **listen for a word of Christ to you**; share together...

Read the passage for a third time, and be attentive to **a word from Christ that calls you to act**; share together...

Note down anything which feels significant from what you have heard together.



## 3. Exploring

Given that Peter was speaking to 'fellow Jews' (v 14), how does he use both the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) and the experiences of those who had been in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah they had been longing for?

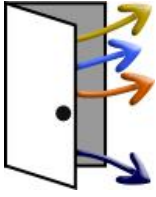
What is the picture of Jesus that Peter creates for those listening?

What kind of pictures of Jesus do we draw for others?

How does the Bible help us see and interpret the work of the Spirit in the world?

What Bible stories or images help illustrate or interpret your story of faith?





## 4. Engaging

Choose one of the following two exercises. Be mindful of anything that emerged through the *Lectio Divina* that might be relevant here.

1. Each person choose and share a verse or phrase from Acts 2.14-36 that might helpfully encourage someone to believe in Christ. How might this be communicated most effectively to a friend, neighbour, colleague or family member?
2. St Ignatius of Loyola, who lived in 16th century Spain, championed a way of praying in which we enter into biblical passages, imagining ourselves actually to be there, and using our emotions as well as our minds to listen and respond to God. (This prayer experience will probably need more time than previous sessions and will need to be led sensitively by a group leader or someone from the group, leaving time for each question)
  - a) Take some time to imagine your way into the crowd on the Day of Pentecost. Find a way to imagine really being present. Try to get in touch with what it felt like ... sounded like ... smelt like...
  - b) Ask someone to read again Peter's words from v 22-24 and 32-36. Hear them as though you were hearing them for the first time on that day.
  - c) Try to allow the words to sink deeply into you, maybe to cut you to the heart.
    - i. What would your response have been: mockery or deep penitence, or something in between?
    - ii. Return to anything significant which emerged from your *Lectio*.

What do you want to say to God as a result of what you have experienced and felt?

- d) Group members may want to make a brief comment on what has emerged for them.

You could use this poem for meditation;

### **Song to the Holy Spirit**

Lord, Holy Spirit,  
You blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,  
Inside and outside the fences,  
You blow where you wish to blow.

Lord, Holy Spirit,  
You are the sun who shines on the little plant,  
You warm him gently, you give him life,  
You raise him up to become a tree with many leaves.

Lord, Holy Spirit,  
You are the mother eagle with her young,  
Holding them in peace under your feathers.  
On the highest mountain you have built your nest,  
Above the valley, above the storms of the world,  
Where no hunter ever comes.

Lord, Holy Spirit,  
You are the bright cloud in whom we hide,  
In whom we know already that the battle has been won.  
You bring us to our Brother Jesus  
To rest our heads upon his shoulder.

Lord, Holy Spirit,  
You are the kind fire who does not cease to burn,  
Consuming us with flames of love and peace,  
Driving us out like sparks to set the world on fire.

Lord, Holy Spirit,  
In the love of friends you are building a new house,  
Heaven is with us when you are with us.  
You are singing your songs in the hearts of the poor  
Guide us, wound us, heal us. Bring us to the Father.

James K. Baxter

A concluding prayer:

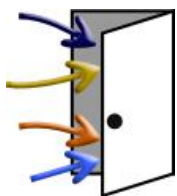
**God our Father,  
your servants showed from your written word  
that your Son Jesus is the living word.  
May your word dwell in us richly,  
That we may know it thoroughly,  
use it wisely,  
and see its power to shape our lives  
and the lives of others.  
Amen.**



## Session Five – Acts 2.37–47 Living

The aim of this session is to:

- hear again how Peter invited his hearers into a new way of living.
- consider how the responses of the believers shaped the practices of the early Christian community.
- explore what it might mean for us to live more fully as the Spirit-filled church of Jesus Christ.



### 1. Entering

This is our final session before we walk with our Lord through Holy Week and his passion and resurrection.

What are the biblical texts that you can expect to hear in worship over Holy Week and Easter?

Sometimes we are so familiar with the scriptures that we don't really 'hear' them. Recall an experience when you heard and were moved by scripture as if you heard it 'for the first time'.

Can each person read any particular verses that have been significant to them within their life and say why?

A prayer (from Kenya):      **For the Spirit of truth**

From the cowardice that dares not face new truth,  
from the laziness that is contented with half-truth,  
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,  
Good Lord, deliver us.

**Amen.**



## 2. Encountering

Background: *Lectio divina*

*Lectio divina* is a contemplative way of praying the Scriptures. The word 'contemplation' is derived from the Latin *contemplatio* (*con* + *templum*), where *templum* was an open place consecrated for observation of worship practices. So when we contemplate Scripture, first of all we become aware that this is a hallowed time, that we have this 'space' to really behold the Word behind, within and before the words. Reading thus is a holy moment, an opportunity to encounter the Word.

Taking verses in turns, read Acts 2: 37 to the end of the chapter **as if for the very first time**.

Share together a word or **a phrase which struck you**, or which you had never quite noticed before...

Read the passage again, and this time, **listen for a word of Christ to you**; share together...

Read the passage for a third time, and be attentive to **a word from Christ that calls you to act**; share together...

Note down anything which feels significant from what you have heard together.

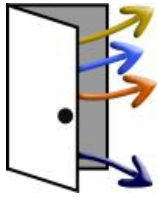


## 3. Exploring

Peter and the apostles pointed those who were 'cut to the heart' towards specific things they needed to do to fulfil their calling. How do the following terms feature in your understanding of your own baptism and Christian faith?

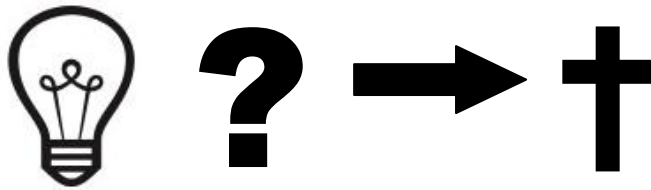
- Repentance?
- Forgiveness?
- Gift of the Holy Spirit?
- Promise for everyone?

How far does the life of your church echo the characteristics of the early church from 2:42-47? What might help it to do so more?



## 4. Engaging

The 'Swedish Method' of Bible study and Prayer is a simple framework, where you read a passage and mark a light bulb against a word or phrase which particularly shines out to you, a question mark where there is something you're uncertain of or would like to talk about further, and arrow where there is something you ought to do, and a cross where something makes you love and honour Jesus more. (It might help if each person had a photocopied sheet with the text)



You could use this method with the passage from v 37-47, and then each person can share one 'arrow' with the group.

As this course comes to an end, think about how your experience together has affected you.

- Did your attitude to reading the scriptures alter?
- Were you aware of how the group dynamic affected your learning and how you might have affected their learning?
- Were you curious to explore more, and could you do that later?
- Did you notice how you might have been resistant or unready to explore certain areas?
- What is one specific action you would like to take to Easter and beyond?

Use these verses from Ephesians 3.14-21 as a blessing prayer for one another:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,  
**from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.**

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory,  
**he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,**

and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,  
**as you are being rooted and grounded in love.**

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints,  
**what is the breadth and length and height and depth,**

and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,  
**so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,

**to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Consider how you have 'blessed' one another through the course. How can you 'bless' one another in the coming weeks after Easter?

You may like to use this poem for meditation and celebration;

i am a little church(no great cathedral)  
far from the splendor and squalor of hurrying cities  
- i do not worry if briefer days grow briefest,  
i am not sorry when sun and rain make april

my life is the life of the reaper and the sower;  
my prayers are prayers of earth's own clumsily striving  
(finding and losing and laughing and crying)children  
whose any sadness or joy is my grief or my gladness

around me surges a miracle of unceasing  
birth and glory and death and resurrection:  
over my sleeping self float flaming symbols  
of hope, and i wake to a perfect patience of mountains

i am a little church(far from the frantic  
world with its rapture and anguish)at peace with nature  
- i do not worry if longer nights grow longest;  
i am not sorry when silence becomes singing

winter by spring, i lift my diminutive spire to  
merciful Him Whose only now is forever:  
standing erect in the deathless truth of His presence  
(welcoming humbly His light and proudly His darkness)

e. e. cummings

In prayer:

- Give thanks to God for all he has blessed you with through one another
- Commit yourself to God and his service.
- Pray for one another and the challenges you face

**A concluding prayer:**

**Father God,  
you have called your church into being  
as the penitent, forgiven, Spirit-filled company  
of those who worship your risen Son.  
As we devote ourselves to living for you,  
add to our number those you are saving,  
and fill the world with awe at your power and grace. Amen.**