

Last Days

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Pentecost, AOB, all these readings (very long readings)...there is so much to talk about. I could probably preach three sermons, but don't worry, I'm not going to. You only get one.

We can talk about the birthday of the church. Today, as the disciples are filled with the holy spirit and become not disciples, but apostles. No longer followers, but those who are sent out.

From John, we could talk about what the holy spirit is like. This paraclete that is given: whether an advocate, an encourager, or a renewer.

And I know it sounds so great—on this first Pentecost in two years—to hear: *and they were all gathered together*. And here we are!

This Pentecost though, there is one part that stuck with me as Peter quotes from the prophet Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour my spirit upon all flesh. And I will show importance in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

This was not what I was expecting. Last days? End of the world? Not a great topic for AOB Sunday.

But these last days stuck with me, and so I went back to the source: the prophet, Joel.

Peter quotes from the prophet Joel from the second chapter. And Joel doesn't actually say *in the last days*, Joel says *afterward* in the Hebrew.

He has been talking about how there has been so much trouble for the Israelites: how there has been famine and war, how they have been taken over by their neighbors and live in fear, how they have gone to worship other gods. And Joel says, *here's all these things that have happened to you. But afterward, you will see the spirit being poured out upon all flesh, and then your children will see visions. They will prophesize. They will dream dreams.*

It is in the last days of occupation by larger nations that threatened to devour them. Joel is talking about the last days of living in fear. The people of Israel, of course, throughout their history will still face violence and war. But the inbreaking of the holy spirit is a sign that things are about to change.

So we go back to Peter, who has been huddled with the disciples. Jesus has gone. They're waiting for something to happen, but they're not quite sure what. Jesus has gone up to heaven. He has ascended, and they're huddled again. And then the holy spirit shows up with that rush of wind and tongues as a flame. And those become the last days of living in fear, of staying out of the way, of being quiet.

As the holy spirit is bestowed upon many people of various nations and backgrounds, those become the last days of some being in and some being out.

As we hear how Christian communities form, they become the last days of income inequality as they live in common.

On that Pentecost day later in Acts, we hear that Peter's preaching adds 3,000 people to their number. Because of the holy spirit, these become the last days of the followers of Jesus being a very fringe movement.

As we look through the Bible and our own history, it seems like the holy spirit just loves to usher in some last days:

In the beginning, the spirit hovered over the waters, and those became the last days of darkness and nothingness.

In Numbers, it says the spirit was in Joshua. So Moses appointed him to be a leader, and those were the last days of wandering in the wilderness, the last days of being without a home.

In our reading from Romans, we hear the spirit has been given, and those are the last days of a spirit of slavery, the last days of not belonging before they are adopted.

The spirit comes to the prophet, so that those will be the last days of injustice and worshiping other gods.

And our gospel. As Jesus tells the disciples about their advocate—their companion—he's telling them that they're in

their last days of Jesus being physically present with them. The last days of being just followers, because now they will be apostles. It is the last days of the Jesus movement being just one corner of the world, as it spreads throughout the globe.

When God is going to change the world, the holy spirit shows up to usher in some last days.

The abolitionists were full of the holy spirit, and we saw the last days of slavery.

With Martin Luther king, Jr., we saw the last days of segregation.

With Nelson Mandela began the last days of apartheid.

In the crowd at Stonewall, we saw the last days of legal discrimination against the queer community.

The holy spirit just keeps showing up.

So today, as we celebrate this one day in Acts, we call the holy spirit to be with us again. As we ask for a special gift of the holy spirit on our confirmations, and as they affirm the promises made for them at baptism, I wonder what last days do we get to be part of?

As we ask for the holy spirit to be bestowed on Eric, Chloe, Ryan, Grace, Emily, what last days will you be a part of?

For sure, these are the last days of AOB classes. They are the last days of you being adolescents in the congregation before you become voting members. But what things will you bring an end to? How will the holy spirit dwelling in your life change this world?

Because the most beautiful thing about the last days is that they're followed by the first days.

The first days of peace.

The first days of justice.

The first days of equity.

The first days of renewal.

The first days of hope,

The first days of the new reign of God coming on earth as in heaven.

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.

Thanks be to God.