

Acts 2:1-13 Festivals of Life
John 7:37-39
May 24, 2026

In Judaism, there were three great pilgrimage festivals; Pesach Passover, Sukkot Tabernacles, and Shavuot. The name itself refers simply to a week, seven days, and the feast is sometimes called the, “Festival of Weeks.” It is a week of weeks, or forty-nine days.

The holy day seems to have had double duty. It marked the spring harvest and involved the consumption of dairy foods, as well as the reading of the Book of Ruth. It also came along fifty days after Passover and celebrated the time after the Exodus when Moses received the Ten Commandments on the Holy mountain. Shavuot is the Hebrew name for the same holy day that in Greek is called Pentecost.

It was at the Jewish Festival of Shavuot that the believer’s gathered in Jerusalem where pilgrims had gathered from all over what was to them the world. Jesus had been crucified, and raised, and ascended into heaven, and now they waited.

The story is, “matter of fact.” They were gathered, the Holy Spirit came and they were able to speak in other languages. They began to explain the gospel story to people from other places where the other languages were spoken. Thus began the spread of what would soon be called the Christian faith beyond its Judean roots.

As a result, Christianity has adapted the festival to mark the arrival of the Spirit, which results, in some traditions, to this Sunday also being called Trinity Sunday. *And*, to add one more thing to remember, sometimes in churches related to the Anglican tradition, Whitsuntide, which refers to the wearing of white baptismal robes representing purity, joy, and glory, hearkening back to a time when Pentecost was a favored baptismal day.

It may also have influenced the outdated fashion etiquette of only wearing white between Easter and Labor Day. Sometimes cultural traditions and religious holy days overlap.

While the text in the second chapter of Acts is the main reading for the day, it is not the only one. The arrival of the Spirit is also a prominent feature in the Gospel of John. In the 20th chapter we read;

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.

The first time the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Gospel of John occurs back in the seventh Chapter, when Jesus went up to the Festival of Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, the fall harvest celebration. There Jesus foreshadows the arrival of the Holy Spirit in an encounter on the last day, saying;

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,

rivers of living water will flow within them.” And then in an editorial comment we are told by the author, “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not been glorified).

“Rivers of living water from within,” is a metaphor of a certain quality of the inner life, and the promise is that in the interim period between the Ascension and the Return of the Lord, believers are accompanied by the living presence of God’s Spirit.

Every different expression of the Christian Faith must come to terms with the events at Pentecost. What are the ramifications of the arrival of the Spirit into the life of the church and into our own lives?

We have spoken before about the two realms; the distinction between material and spiritual life. We may also speak of the same distinction in terms of two histories, the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine. Let me suggest that this is a helpful distinction as we seek to understand the Pentecost experience.

Most, if not all the time, when someone refers to, “history,” they are referring to the story of human decision-making and the actions that follow. It includes everything from political to military history, and it sometimes seems focused there. But there is also cultural and religious history, the history of technology and literature and more besides.

Everything that has anything to do with human life on earth.

Think of all the technology innovations and trends. Perhaps they begin with the discovery of how to control fire and use the wheel, and tools of leverage to help lift heavy objects, and cutting tools. Then comes along the domestication and breeding of large animals and the ability to cultivate crops, thus farm life emerges as a part of the human story.

And when we allow ourselves to move to recent times, we find blast furnaces and communications and transportation technology that constantly catches us off guard with the speed of its changes. We deal now with social media and the rapid approach of artificial intelligence.

Just this past week there was a court case between two billionaires over the issue of whether Artificial Intelligence should be a nonprofit endeavor or a for profit enterprise. Such decisions are still being made. That is one history.

But the theological interpretation of life is based on the conviction that God has a story as well. And *that* story questions our assumptions about the significance of the human history, all the gains we think we have made.

In God’s history, the story begins before the dawn of Creation, and runs continuously through all these human success stories and the failures as well. It is a

judgment upon the emptiness of our pursuits. It is a tempting tendency to believe that meaning in life is bound up the kinds of things associated with the these pursuits.

It tells that the source of genuine life does not come from the human side of things; about human sinfulness and the tragedy of the failures among human societies to achieve a better life, a better community, a better world.

And then it tells of Reconciliation and Redemption, of Mercy and Grace. It challenges us to live our lives towards God. It promises that there is a reckoning and a renewal.

It tells about the supremacy of the rule of love, and asks for an obedient response in faith that leads to goodness and compassion. It reveals that God is gracious and forgiving. It invites us to become a part of the divine story by accepting God's grace in faith.

At times, it seems as if these two histories are as disconnected as it is possible to be. But in Christ, they are not, for Jesus, as the Christ, is the bridge between both realms. His sacrificial death reveals God's nature, and the nature of God's actions, and the commitment to the world that God has made, even the world of human beings.

The Holy Spirit, given at Pentecost, links the divine to the human histories. It grounds us in God's abiding presence, merciful and kind, nurturing towards

righteousness, to use one of the old theological words; towards lives characterized by a concern for the well-being of others, and away from an obsessive self-concern, because God cares for us.

The Holy Spirit is God, guiding, challenging, disciplining, forgiving, creating faith, comforting and empowering. The Spirit is also active in the world. The Lord is the lord of history, which means that the Divine history stands above the human.

All of this, according to John, leads to a welling up in us of something like a spring out of which living water comes, which means *life*; shaping our lives and character, directing our paths, protecting us from danger, engaging us in God's work.

Beginning next week, there are no major emphases in the Christian year until Advent. The present is called, "Time after Pentecost," or, "Ordinary Time." The focus is on the life in the Spirit.

And so we observe and celebrate the coming of summer, and a solemn but not a sad time of memorial for those who have sacrificed for a better life; and we acknowledge the power of the Easter message and the arrival of the Holy Spirit, in this collection of emphases that are rightly called, festivals of life, for that is what they are, and what they mean.

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