



Church History

Teachers Guide



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Law/Gospel Focus

Through His grace and the power of His Spirit, God uses sinful and unworthy people to lay a solid and trustworthy foundation for His church.

Objectives

That by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, the students will

- describe the central role of the Spirit in the establishment of the Christian church;
- acknowledge that their own failures are no different than those of the apostles; and
- look to Christ for forgiveness, grace, and power.

Background

Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival. It came to be a celebration of the giving of the Ten Commandments as God's special covenant with the Israelites. After Christ's resurrection, God chose the observance of that holiday as the moment to bring about the birth of His "new Israel," the church.

Worship Ideas

- ♫ List names of those who teach or preach God's Word in your congregation. Speak or sing "We Are the Church" (AGPS 252) as an introduction to how Pentecost unites all believers in the work of the church.
- Lead your class in a prayer thanking God for the blessings of His Holy Spirit and asking that He would continue to bless your class abundantly with His good gifts.

INTRODUCE

The Day It Began: Provide background about the original Feast of Pentecost by reviewing the following from the Old Testament:

"Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field" (Exodus 23:16).

"Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year" (Exodus 34:22).

"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day

Pentecost—The Birth of the Christian Church

after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD" (Leviticus 23:15–16).

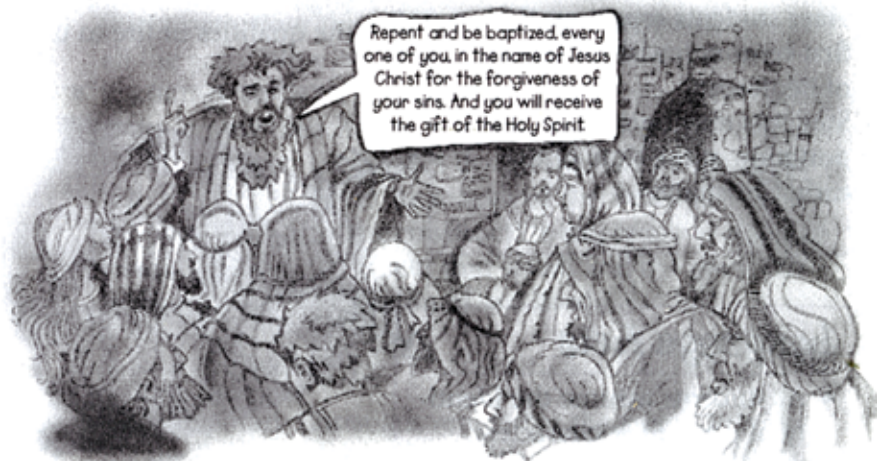
Invite students to imagine how the disciples felt after Jesus had gone into heaven. Allow time for students to share. Affirm feelings of fear, isolation, perhaps even disillusionment as they waited in the city where, 50 days earlier, their leader was executed on a cruel Roman cross.

DEVELOP

Explain that today's lesson looks at the qualifications of the church's first leaders. Distribute Blackline 1. Have groups read and discuss the references, noting how the disciples' behaviors and attitudes could raise serious questions about their qualifications to lead God's church.

Optional: Compare the disciples' failures with the immoral actions of some of our leaders today. Discuss how the media and politicians deal with these behaviors.

Pentecost—The Birth of the Christian Church



The Day It Began

Sometimes it's possible to know the exact day of an important historical event. The United States, for example, celebrates the Fourth of July each year as its birthday, remembering the date in 1776 when the Declaration of Independence was signed. But the dates of other historical events are not so easy to determine. No one knows when the first people came to the North American continent and decided to call it home.

Interestingly, historians are not sure about the actual year when the Christian church came into being, but we clearly know the day. As reported by Luke in Acts 2, it happened on the Feast of Pentecost in the year that Jesus was crucified. At the time of Jesus' ministry on earth, Pentecost was a Jewish festival celebrating the Feast of Weeks, also called the Feast of Harvest and Day of the First Fruits. It was observed every year, 50 days after the Passover festival.

Each year, many Jews would celebrate

Pentecost by taking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, much like today's American tradition of traveling to Times Square for New Year's Eve. So on that particular Pentecost, as Luke reports, the Jewish holy city was filled with Jews from far and wide: "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ... Cretans and Arabs."

Also in Jerusalem that day was a group of confused men from Galilee—the disciples of Jesus. About seven weeks earlier, they had fled when Jesus was arrested, hidden themselves after His crucifixion, rejoiced at His resurrection, and been astonished at His continuing appearances and disappearances. During those weeks He had "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45), especially how His death and resurrection had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. He also instructed them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father

Optional: Ask volunteers to improvise speeches, playing disciples trying to explain their actions.

In your discussion of Blackline 1, accept responses similar to the following.

(1) Peter doubted Jesus' power. (2) He denied knowing Jesus.

(3) James and John asked Jesus to give them more authority than the other disciples. (4) They fell asleep rather than following Jesus' request that they pray with Him.

(5) All the disciples refused to let children spend time with Jesus.

(6) They all deserted Jesus in Gethsemane.

How It Began: Read the first paragraph of this section. The disciples' lives were changed forever. Ask volunteers to describe personal experiences that changed their lives (e.g., surviving a natural disaster, the death of a loved one).

Optional: Ask volunteers to act out the Pentecost story, exploring what the disciples may have felt or been thinking.

Then read the rest of the section.

RESPOND

How It Turns Out: Invite students to debate this statement: "If we knew everything about our friends, we would no longer be friends." Point out that everyone thinks and acts in ways that often seem best to keep secret. Ask whether this need to "hide" who we really are makes us hypocrites.

promised" (Acts 1:4). Finally, 10 days before Pentecost, they traveled with Jesus to Bethany, where He was "taken up before their very eyes" into heaven.

And so they waited in Jerusalem, far from their homes, surrounded not only by the crowd of pilgrims, but also by the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers who had taken part in Jesus' crucifixion.

How It Began

Luke's account of the birth of the church is stated in simple words: "They were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house ... They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [languages] as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:1-4).

On that day, the disciples were changed forever. Not only could they speak languages they had never learned, they also were filled with astonishing courage, purpose, and resolve. Coming out of their place of safety, they confronted and confounded the crowds that were gathering at the noise. With Peter as their spokesman, they silenced hecklers and openly accused those gathered of having murdered the Son of God. Now, by the Spirit's power, they truly were able to understand that their risen Lord was the fulfillment of God's loving plan of salvation, and they became bold witnesses to anyone who would listen.

On that day, over 3,000 of their listeners were moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to believe their message. On that day, Christ's church was born.

How It Turns Out

1. Although Peter was changed powerfully by God's gift of the Holy Spirit, years later he was still messing things up. Read the Apostle Paul's description of Peter's hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-14. Describe Peter's mistake in your own words.

[Peter acted hypocritically.]

2. Paul knew that he didn't have the right to feel self-righteous about himself either. Read his description of his own struggles in Romans 7:21-25. Write a description of both his frustration and his continuing hope.

[Paul confesses his evil actions despite his good intentions. He trusts that Jesus will rescue him.]

3. Consider your own life and situation. Describe the challenges and frustrations you face in your struggle against sin. Tell about of the hope you have in Jesus.

[Answers will vary.]

To Review and Remember

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. *1 Corinthians 2:4-5*

Give students several minutes to read and work through the questions. When finished, check student understanding by discussing their answers.

1. Peter was openly hypocritical. He was willing to eat with Gentiles, except when certain Jewish leaders were around. At those times, he avoided the Gentile Christians.

2. Paul admits that he often does evil, even when he knows what is good and wants to do it. But he continues to trust that Jesus rescues him from this sinful state.

3. All Christians share two characteristics with Peter and Paul: We are sinners living in Christ's forgiveness. We are chosen by God to help carry out His work.

Then ask, **Why does God use "losers" to do His work?** Accept student responses, then ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 1:27-31. Note that God chooses those who seem unqualified so it will be obvious that what is accomplished is only through His grace and power.



Extending the Lesson

- Prepare and use a litany of repentance and thanksgiving, acknowledging God's desire to use each person to do His work.
- Make cards for congregational leaders, thanking them for their service.
- Encourage students to explore Concordia University System's Web site (higher-ed.lcms.org) for information about full-time church work.



Involving the Family

- Encourage students to brainstorm with their families activities to encourage their congregation's leaders.
- Brainstorm and send home a list of activities that families might do together to help the congregation fulfill its work. Encourage families to choose one and carry it out.





Law/Gospel Focus

On our own, we are not capable of believing in Jesus or of professing our faith in Him. As the Holy Spirit works through the Word, God creates and sustains saving faith in Jesus, providing forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and empowering and equipping us for lives of faithful witness and service to Him.

Objectives

That by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, the students will

- confess their faith in Jesus Christ;
- relate the experiences of the apostles and their willingness to proclaim the Gospel in the face of hardship, persecution, and martyrdom; and
- explain how they might continue the apostles' work of bringing the Good News of Jesus to all people.

Background

After Pentecost, the Jewish people who were unwilling to accept Jesus and were disillusioned with waiting for the Messiah (whom they believed would come to free them from Roman rule) rebelled against Rome. In response, Titus, leader of the Roman army, laid siege to Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Victorious, Titus' army destroyed Herod's beautiful temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus: "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). The Jewish people were devastated at the destruction of the temple—a symbol of their nation and religion. Yet, in truth, they no longer needed the temple and its altar and sacrifices. Jesus had come to be the once-for-all sacrifice for all people. From now on, God's people could worship Him anywhere in the name of Jesus.

Worship Ideas

🎵 Read or sing "Go into the World" (AGPS 101).

Talk about what God has done to preserve and protect the faith of His people throughout history.

- Lead students in a prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to assure them of their salvation and to fill them with boldness to share that certainty with others. Ask God to open their eyes to the many events of history in which He has preserved His church so that His name might be glorified.

The Age of the Apostles

INTRODUCE

The Apostle Paul: Invite students to read this section. Comment that as God strengthens His people through the Word, times of persecution are often times of great growth for the Christian church. Point out that God answered Stephen's prayer in the conversion of Paul, who became a mighty soldier in the army of those who love and trust in Jesus.

DEVELOP

Two Centers of Christianity: Read or have a volunteer read this section. Stress that the congregation in Antioch was the first to mix large numbers Jewish and Gentile believers. As an act of Christian love and charity, the believers in Antioch provided funds for the poor

The Age of the Apostles

The Apostle Paul

After Pentecost, the Jewish leaders of the church were concerned about the numbers of people converting to what they thought was a new religion. A time of persecution resulted. Stephen, the first martyr, willingly died for his Savior. As the leaders of the established religion stoned him, Stephen prayed for those who were killing him. One of those responsible was a man named Saul.

Later, Saul traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute followers of Jesus living there. But God had other plans. Jesus appeared to Saul in a vision and converted him. In Damascus, Saul, also called Paul, was baptized. After the calling of Jesus, Paul the persecutor of believers became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles (those not of Jewish origin).

God also told the apostle Peter to reach out to the Gentiles with the Gospel. Peter became the first apostle to enter a Gentile home and baptize a non-Jewish household.

Two Centers of Christianity

During the first years of persecution, believers in Jerusalem worked to bring the Good News mostly to Jewish people. But because of persecution, those believing in Jesus fled to other cities, where the numbers of those confessing Jesus as their Savior grew. One of these cities was Antioch, the capital of the

Roman province of Syria. Here believers spoke about Jesus to Jews and Gentiles alike. The church in Antioch was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch. These first Christians raised funds to aid Paul and his coworker Barnabas in their work with the poor in Jerusalem. In this way, the new believers showed their love in Christ to the believers in Jerusalem.

Into All the World

Paul and his coworkers, such as Barnabas and Silas, traveled on several missionary journeys, preaching the Good News and establishing congregations in the regions of Asia Minor. Responding to a vision of a man from Macedonia asking for help, Paul also led a missionary expedition to the continent of Europe. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote letters to the young congregations he helped to start. He sent these letters, or epistles, to the congregations at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. The letters are included in the New



in the church at Jerusalem from where the emissaries of the Gospel came.

Into All the World: As you work through this section with your students, comment on the sacrifice the apostles made to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ into all the world. Conclude by mentioning that God wants the work begun by the apostles to be continued by His people today.

RESPOND

I Confess: Invite students to work either independently or in groups to answer the questions. Discuss their responses as a whole group.

1. Stress that our "Jerusalem" is the area in which we live; our "Judea and Samaria" compares with our land and country, and we, too, are involved in the Christian goal of bringing the Good News of Jesus to all people. We received the power and motivation to be Christ's ambassadors when we first came to faith.

2. Answers will vary.

3. Confessions will vary.

Testament. Paul suffered many hardships at the hands of the enemies of the Gospel. Most likely, he died a martyr's death in Rome.

After Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles continued to tell others about Jesus and His gift of salvation. Peter traveled to Antioch and on to Joppa, where he raised Tabitha to life. Bold and courageous in preaching the Gospel, an ancient account records that Peter died a martyr's death. He is said to have asked to be crucified head downward, because he regarded himself unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord.

James, the brother of John, was the first of the apostles to die for his faith. King Herod arrested James and had him killed by sword. James' brother John worked with Peter and the younger James in the congregation at Jerusalem. He later carried the Gospel to Asia Minor and became pastor at Ephesus. Later, John was sent to the island of Patmos as a Roman prisoner. When freed, he returned to Ephesus, where he died of natural causes when he was about 100 years old. John was the only apostle to die a natural death.

Andrew is said to have carried the Gospel to the Russians and to have been crucified on a cross resembling the letter X. James the younger, a leader of the church in Jerusalem, is said to have been thrown from the top of the temple tower for refusing to deny Jesus as His Savior. Historians believe Philip became a missionary in Phrygia, and Bartholomew is said to have taken the Gospel to India, where he was stoned, tortured, and executed. Thomas reputedly also preached the Good News of Jesus in India, where he was killed with a lance.

Matthew is believed to have been a missionary in Ethiopia and Persia. Simon and Jude are said to have lost their lives in Persia. Whereas very little is known about Matthias, the apostle who replaced Judas, it is assumed that he also proclaimed the Good News to others.

I Confess

Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit empowers us to confess our faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told the disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When did we receive the same power Jesus gave to His disciples at Pentecost?

[When we first came to faith, such as at our Baptism.]

2. What opportunities do we have to share the Good News in our "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"?

[Answers will vary.]

3. Write a brief confession of faith to share with a friend or relative who does not know Jesus as Savior.

[Responses will vary.]

To Review and Remember

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

Extending the Lesson

- Ask students to choose one of the apostles and write a journal entry reflecting one day in that apostle's ministry.
- As a class, begin a canned-food drive that will last throughout the subsequent lessons. Designate an area of the classroom for the collection spot. Mark the area with a sign that expresses the class goal (e.g., 500 cans of food) and a Bible passage, such as "We love because He first loved us." This will serve as a daily reminder that collecting food is one of the ways students can share the love of Jesus.

Involving the Family

- Have the students begin a prayer journal. Using a small notebook, they will write the date at the top of the page and their prayer requests below. This will give students an opportunity to reflect on their prayers and their spiritual growth throughout the semester. Today, ask them to pray for families they know who are encountering difficulties.
- Duplicate and distribute Blackline 2. Urge students to use the sheet for family devotions.

