



## WEEK SEVEN | PENTECOST: Numbers 11:24-30

### Eastertide The Resurrection Life: A Brief Introduction

In the church calendar, Easter (or Eastertide) continues until Pentecost (seven weeks after Easter, May 24). It is a period in which Christians are encouraged to reflect on the joy, transformation, and celebration of the resurrection.

During this series we will be following the lectionary readings (The lectionary is a three-year cycle of readings with four readings assigned to each Sunday; one from the gospels, one from the epistles, one from the psalms, and, usually, one from another part of the Old Testament.). The preachers each week will choose one or more of the texts as the basis of the reflections on the resurrection life.

The lectionary readings for this series are in the table below. If you would like more information you can use the following link to learn more: <https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025-6-YearA-UCA-Lectionary.pdf>

Date	First Reading	Psalm	Second Reading	Gospel
April 12	Acts 2:14a, 22-32	Psalm 16	1 Peter 1:3-9	John 20:19-31
April 19	Acts 2:14a, 36-41	Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19	1 Peter 1:17-23	Luke 24:13-35
April 26	Acts 2:42-47	Psalm 23	1 Peter 2:19-25	John 10:1-10
May 3	Acts 7:55-60	Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16	1 Peter 2:1-10	John 14:1-14
May 10	Acts 17:22-31	Psalm 66:8-20	1 Peter 3:13-22	John 14:15-21
May 17	Acts 1:6-14	Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35	1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11	John 17:1-11
May 24	Acts 2:1-21 OR Numbers 11:24-30	Psalm 104:24-34, 35b	1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 OR Acts 2:1-21	John 20:19-23 OR 7:37-39

## Sermon Outline:

### A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

**Key Text(s):** Numbers 11:24-30

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers in Jerusalem Peter stood up and explained to the crowd that had gathered what was happening. In the course of this first Christian sermon, he reflected on Joel 2:28-32 (among other OT texts) which described the new age of the Spirit, poured out as a sign of what God had accomplished in Jesus.

There are, however, other Old Testament texts that provide us with perspective on the events of that first Pentecost (Technically, of course, it wasn't the first – the Jewish people had been celebrating Pentecost for generations. This ancient festival was, like Passover, reinterpreted by Jesus!). One such text is the Old Testament reading for today: Numbers 11:24-30.

This text recounts a mini-Pentecost in which the Holy Spirit was shared among seventy elders of Israel. The context in which this remarkable event takes place provides us with an important perspective of the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost.

In Numbers 10:11 we are told that the people of Israel began the eleven day journey (Deuteronomy 1:2) to the Promised Land. Arranged in the order prescribed by the Lord and with the ark of the covenant leading them, Moses and the people set out.

Almost immediately, however, things go sideways. Numbers 11:1-3 briefly recounts a complaint of the people that aroused the anger of the Lord and culminated in fire breaking out at the edges of the camp and consuming some of them!

This is a shocking turn of events and doesn't bode well for the rest of the short trip. It is worth pausing to consider the nature of the Israelite's complaint since, in the rest of Scripture (especially the Psalms), bringing a lament to the Lord is not met with his anger, but with his compassion, mercy, and rescue. This suggests that this is more than just a bit of a whinge after a long day of travel. This intuition is confirmed and expanded on in the events of the next day (at least that's how it reads – on such a short journey it must have happened shortly after the events of 11:1-3.).

"The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (11:4-6)

Once again, this is so much more than the expression of a desire for a more diverse menu! It calls into question the value of the Lord's rescue from Egypt, it expresses a failure of trust in the Lord's ability to provide and despises the provision they had received! It points to a people whose hearts are not set after the Lord.

This is borne out in the account that follows. In verse 22 Moses questions if any amount of meat would satisfy the people. This is not just about the amount required to feed such a large crowd, but whether feeding the crowd would solve their heart problem. In verses 31-32a the Lord sends quail to the camp and all that day, all that night, and all the next day, the Israelites gathered quail. The narrator reports that "no one gathered less than ten homers" – the textual note in the NIVUK suggests this may have been 1.6 metric tons!! The people gave full vent to their gluttonous greed, resulting in judgment.

When Moses complains to the Lord (without arousing the Lord's anger) he describes the people of Israel as a great burden. What is the burden? It isn't administrative. The number of people has never been one of Moses' concerns. The context suggests that the burden is that he is leading a people whose hearts are not set on following the Lord and who will continue to arouse the Lord's anger until they are all destroyed.

In response to Moses' appeal, the Lord promises to do two things. He will provide the people with meat – enough for a month (by which time they should have been in the Promised Land) – and, more importantly, he will give the Spirit that is on Moses to seventy elders of the people. This latter event is described in similar ways to the theophany (the appearance of God) on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. The people are to prepare themselves for the Lord's appearance (11:18) and gather around the tabernacle.

When they do, the Lord comes down and speaks to them and the Spirit rests on the seventy elders who begin to prophesy. We are left to assume that, even though they only prophesied this once, that the Spirit remained on them.

The act of prophesying, if it is like Moses, was not an ecstatic experience or a series of predictions about the future, but the proclamation of the word of the Lord. Like Moses, the seventy elders may have reminded the people of what the Lord had done, of their purpose in God's plans, and of the obligations of the relationship they were in. Whatever it consisted of, the people noticed!

The "solution" was to increase the amount of "Moses" per capita. There were now more Spirit filled people – whose hearts were set on following the Lord who could help teach and lead the people.

When Joshua (who was apparently not one of the elders) protested to Moses, asking him to stop them Moses responds, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

The seventy elders only appear once more in the story and their presence among the tribes of Israel is not enough to overcome the obstinate hearts of the Israelites who, at the border of Canaan, refuse to trust the Lord and are condemned to spend a generation in the wilderness.

This min-Pentecost does suggest a reason for the outpouring of the Spirit on the believers in Acts. The Spirit was necessary because their hearts were not perfectly set on following the Lord. Left to their own devices they would have inevitably been found "wailing at the entrance of their tents" about their hardships. The Spirit was given to transform their hearts. And like Israel needed more Moses per capita, the believers needed more Jesus.

We are no different. The Spirit has been given to us to continue to transform us into the likeness of Jesus that we might fully participate in all the plans and purposes of God in the world.

## Questions to Ask

1. What do Israel's complaints in Numbers 11 reveal about the condition of their hearts, and why do you think that matters so much in this passage?
2. The sermon distinguishes honest lament from grumbling rooted in distrust. How can we tell the difference in our own lives?
3. Why do you think God responded to Moses by sharing His Spirit with the seventy elders, and what does that tell us about leadership among God's people?
4. Moses says, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets." How does that statement help us understand what happens later at Pentecost?
5. The sermon says that the Spirit was given to transform God's people, not just empower them for a moment. Where do you most need the Spirit's transforming work in your life right now?
6. What would it look like for our group to live this week as people being made more like Jesus by the Holy Spirit?

## A Prayer to Pray

Pray for one another and for GBC that the Spirit might continue his transforming work in our midst.

Continue to pray for the those participating in Alpha. We ended up with over thirty people registering! Pray that the Spirit would be at work in each participant and for the empowerment of the facilitators.

## A Practice to Try

Select one of the things you identified in Question 6 above to intentionally practice this week.

## Readings to Read This Week

Read the remaining texts from the lectionary and reflect on how they interact with each other on the themes of the resurrection life (see the Table above).

## A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

As we come to the end of May Mission Month we have an opportunity to be Big-Hearted in our financial support of our projects. In uncertain times we can easily allow fear and anxiety to constrict our generosity. This year my prayer is that we will demonstrate our trust in the God who provides as we courageously respond to God's invitation to participate with him in the work he is doing through our partners.

## A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

Our May Mission Month appeal closes June 8. This is an opportunity to financially support the work of God around the world. We encourage people to participate in this appeal – our target this year is a little over \$200,000 – and to give over and above other financial giving. Please encourage your group to begin to prayerfully consider how God may be inviting them to participate in His work around the world.