

A Time of Prayer: Listen

April 2024 Edition

LISTENING FOR DIVINE SPARKS: A BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR APRIL 2024

To facilitate group meetings in person or on Zoom, this month’s Bible study is also offered as [PowerPoint slides](#) that can be downloaded and modified.

OPENING PRAYER

Living God, we thank you that through the resurrection of Jesus our lives and ministries are transformed. Give us humble and obedient hearts, that we may receive what you have made known to us. May we be bold in serving you and bringing your Good News to our communities. Help us to share of ourselves and our possessions with one another and especially with people in need. **Amen.**

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Acts 4:32-35 - United in “One in Heart and Soul”

<i>New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)</i>	<i>The Message (MSG)</i>
32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.	32-33 The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn’t even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, “That’s mine; you can’t have it.” They shared everything. The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them. 34-35 And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person’s need.

LECTIO DIVINA

Ask someone to read the NRSVA translation of the passage aloud.

Allow for several minutes of silence as each bible study participant contemplates the passage, noticing which word(s), sentence(s), idea(s) or feeling(s) catch their attention. The group can decide how long the period of silence should last, but in the *Lectio Divina* tradition, it is substantial (a minimum of 3-5 minutes is suggested, perhaps working up to a longer interlude).

Invite participants to briefly share with one another those word(s), phrase(s), idea(s) or feeling(s) stirring them. Encourage participants to avoid interpreting or expanding on them at this time, but simply to state them out loud. Explain that time for reflection and discussion will follow later in the prayer time.

Have another person read the MSG translation of the passage aloud, followed by a second period of silence and invite participants to share again. The same or different word(s), phrase(s), idea(s) or feeling(s) may emerge.

Have a third person re-read the NRSVA version aloud again, followed by a final period of silence and invite participants to reflect on what they think is being drawn to their attention by the Holy Spirit. There are no right or wrong answers. Consider the following questions:

- *How am I called to give my testimony to the resurrection of Jesus?*
- *What might “holding everything in common” mean in our parish context?*
- *What is God saying to our congregation and our diocesan church through this passage today?*

CLOSING PRAYERS

O Holy God, you breathe your life-giving Spirit into this parish and diocese and call us to join together in mission for the spreading of the Gospel: show us the people to whom we should go and the path we should travel; help us to understand the deep longings of their hearts, and enable us to feed them through the living presence of Jesus Christ our Saviour, in whose power we set forth and in whose Name we pray.
Amen.¹

¹ Prayers from “Litany for the Mission of the Church” (Episcopal Church’s *The Book of Occasional Services*, 2018.)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

CAPTURING THE DIVINE SPARKS KINDLED

- Consider whether there were sparks kindled during this prayer session. Ask a participant to write down any important ideas that emerged and ensure that there is group consensus around what is captured.
- Who do these sparks need to be shared with at this time? Find a way to share the insights gained with those who need to hear them.

ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

- Michal Beth Dinkler writes, “this passage can invite us to ask about resource allocation in our community. How do we spend our resources (monetary or otherwise), and why? Does our community tend to agree or disagree about how we give and receive, about who “deserves” to give or receive, and why? How can we handle disagreements when they inevitably arise, without using this passage to shame our community for not being unified?” Read the brief commentary here: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter-2/commentary-on-acts-432-35-6>
- Matt Skinner writes, “The Holy Spirit pulls people together as members of a community that manifests its newfound salvation in Christ in a corporate existence through its worship, learning, sharing, and service. Consistently in Acts, the story of salvation is a story of belonging.” Read the brief commentary here: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter-2/commentary-on-acts-432-35-5>