



## Easter 3

# THE NEW SHOFAR

...lead a life worthy of the vocation to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4)...

### *The Spirit gathers people together as collaborators with God*

The Book of Acts is all about reminding believers of how they are a part of an ongoing **quest** to discover, steward, and share the good news. What Good News? How through Jesus *God has changed* the world and *God has made* a pledge about the future. Our **quest** begins in trust, a spiritual gift vital for our post-Covid world.

What Peter is doing in Acts 3, is inviting the crowd to begin a journey taking them along the road the earliest Christ-followers were walking. They are called to embrace Jesus and align themselves with Christ's disciples, for it is in them Christ is bringing and enacting the salvation God offers to all peoples. However, for all who choose to follow Christ, the demands of faithfulness are whole-of-life engaging.

### *God is at work when the Body of Christ gathers*

The Spirit gathers the Body of Christ together as one that they might tell others about what Jesus is doing in the world through His death and resurrection. They needed to be open in discerning what God is doing next. It requires they consult the scriptures so as not to forget about all the wonderful promises God is fulfilling. Through it all, they (the baptised family of God) must remain open to the Spirit and trust God to reveal to them more and more ways in which He is enlarging their understanding of the alternate society God is creating. And, above all, they are to never forget how all of that is founded in Jesus and unfolds through Him.

Acts tells believers that they are part of an ongoing, Spirit driven quest to discover, share and be faithful custodians of the Good News: that it is through Jesus Christ that God has changed the world and in Jesus Christ God has made a pledge about the future. This Jesus is at work when believers are gathered together by the Spirit.

To be at one with Jesus is to experience God's work unfolding around us. That quest, our quest begins in a vibrant trust in a God who always completes His promises. We might not always understand where God is leading us, but we have an absolute confidence that Divine Love is at work permeating the layers of human thinking and acting. That is the gift we bring to the world – a promise that God has not given up on humanity, but is constantly opening up pathways to peace and fulfilment.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -  
[anathoth.hough@gmail.com](mailto:anathoth.hough@gmail.com) - [www.houghongod.com](http://www.houghongod.com)

## ***The world is not our enemy – they too are God’s children***

Remember that Peter is preaching as an *insider*. He is an Israelite speaking to *fellow* Israelites about *another* Israelite. The NRSV bible translates the Greek of verse 12 as ***You Israelites***, implying a more distanced relationship, while others more correctly translate it ***Fellow Israelites***, implying the opposite. He unites himself with them. The speech itself takes place in the Temple complex, where Peter and his friends have just come from worship and where they frequently gather to read the Israelite scriptures and teach about Jesus. This, of course, makes his message quite different to one spoken by a religious outsider about a foreign God. His is a politics of inclusion, not of distancing and blame. He is including himself in their sins, in their failures in covenant faithfulness that led to the death of the Messiah on the cross. He is as much to blame for the crucifixion as they are but he has one more divine gift. He has been forgiven, his life transformed and given new directions.

The power of what he is saying resides partly in the way He insists that their Messiah - the risen Lord - now stands in the midst of all of God’s children, even though they had blamed, abandoned, and betrayed Him. This risen Lord Jesus now stands among the “disciples” - all people (*andres*) who are in need of grace, without separating them off into wicked outsiders and righteous insiders. He acknowledges that *all have sinned* and all are offered forgiveness and the chance of a new beginning. He stands amidst them and breathes that great invitation and promise: ***Peace***.

### ***There is power in our coming together***

When Jesus promised the disciples *when two or three gather together in my Name, there I am in the midst of them* He was not just offering them hope and promising them a divine saving presence. He was also guiding them into a way of mission outreach, a way of engaging with the world to which they have been sent.

Luke (the author of Acts) was speaking from an understanding of the Church *coming together* in a variety of forms. One way saw people *meet together* in a small, intimate gathering in which they all could share with one another and exercise their spiritual gifts. Others were larger *gatherings* where preachers would preach and teachers would teach the whole of the body and one or two people could exercise a spiritual gift to the whole body. The power of the Spirit of God manifested itself within these gathering communities and through them out into the wider world.

Paul says, *let all things be done for edification*. For him, *edification* means more than simply teaching, or instruction of the mind; the word is larger than that. It means "building people up." It is the feeling of being built up, edified, instructed, encouraged, comforted, uplifted and ministering those same feelings in others. That is what we do when we physically gather together with fellow believers at Church on Sunday. For the evangelist and the apostle Paul, this *gathering* is the essential first step in the fulfilling of our baptismal commitments. It is how we support others, engage with their spiritual gifts and give witness to the world of a healing Love.

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