

Dear Jesus,

You said we'd know it when the Holy Spirit showed up. No kidding. You might could've warned us about the tongues of fire bit. John's still fuming after Thomas threw a whole bucket of water on his head trying to put the fire out before Thomas realized what might be going on! (I will admit seeing John sitting there dripping wet was pretty funny. You would have gotten a huge laugh out of that!)

Jesus, you would have been so proud of Peter that day! I think he was still struggling and coming to grips with his denial and your forgiveness – though he never would have admitted that to me. But at Pentecost? When he spoke to the crowd? He never hesitated. He boldly declared the good news about you, not shying away from the truth about your crucifixion or your resurrection. We hardly recognized the eloquent speaker Peter became that day. Between you and me, Lord, I think Peter still struggles sometimes with how you've entrusted him with this leadership, despite his failures. But didn't you tell us that your Spirit would be our Comforter? So maybe his moments of insecurity will begin to fade as time goes on.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of your Spirit. We're not quite sure what we're doing but feeling the Spirit's presence with us makes you feel near. We miss you though. Sometimes we get turned around and I wish you could just tell us exactly what to do.

Your friend, your servant,
Philip

Dear Jesus,

Since Pentecost, we've been so busy we can hardly keep up! Thousands, Lord. Thousands of people are coming to hear us tell your story. We never could have imagined this! It's amazing and wonderful and well, terrifying. The thing is, Jesus, these people have questions. Many, many questions. And we're not always sure how to answer them. You told us, didn't you, to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You spoke so much about your Father. We know you, the Son, the one who points the way to the Father. We now feel the real presence of the Spirit. But how do we explain this to others? Jesus, you know we aren't exactly the brightest group.

On that last day in Galilee when you went back to be with your – our – Father, you told us to go and make disciples. But Jesus, you didn't exactly explain to us *how* to do this. We've got all these people – well over 3000 at last count! – and we weren't really prepared for this! We aren't sure how to organize them – or ourselves for that matter. We're making decisions, important decisions, every day as a group but we never really talked about how we were going to make decisions. We pray and then we just act and hope that this is right, what you want us to do. We're, I guess you could call us, pioneers of your Way, but when the pioneers aren't sure of where they're going it can be quite a mess! I'm a tax man, Jesus. I like my numbers and the structure, the clear direction. And there's nothing neat and tidy about any of this! At the rate people are coming to us by a month from now, well the numbers are too overwhelming to think about. So we worship. And we tell stories. And we break bread together. All the things we used to do with you.

And these people that come to us...they have so many needs. They are poor in spirit and poor in their pocketbooks. So many widows who have nowhere else to turn. We put Martha on organizing a way to help these people (you know organizing everything and bossing us around makes Martha happy), but even Martha can't keep up with all these people and all these needs. We weren't sure about how to go about adding to our leadership, but we had to do something or Martha would have killed us. We picked 7 people to help make

sure everyone, especially the widows, were being taken care of. These 7, Lord, you would be so amazed at how well they have stepped into the fray to serve you and your people!

I wish there was a way to speak with you face to face. We miss you. We're all so unsure of what we're doing here. As people respond to the good news of you, we rejoice. We tell our stories and we give thanks for all that you are doing. I hope we aren't messing all of this up...

Your friend, your disciple,
Matthew

Dear Jesus,

What have we done? What have we gotten ourselves into? We've lost Stephen. They stoned him, Lord, like something out of our worst nightmares. This promising young man, one chosen to help serve our community, so full of the Holy Spirit, so strong in his faith. False witnesses, riotous crowds just like that horrible night you were arrested. Whatever have we done, bringing these people in, putting their lives at risk?

You warned us. I know you did. You told us how they wouldn't understand us, how people would hate us, and persecute us. John and I have already been arrested several times. The Pharisees and the Sadducees have turned us in to outlaws. There are even some within our own community who aren't happy with us, who think we're renegades. They don't like having Gentiles in our group. They consider Gentiles outsiders or second class members. But Philip met a guy from Ethiopia and it really changed Philip's mind. And Lord, I've been having some strange dreams about food, including pigs! We remember going through Samaria with you, Jesus, and our time spent across the Sea of Galilee in the Decapolis.

We may be outlaws and renegades, but so were you! And we know that never stopped you from reaching out to all people, even when it made others mad.

We're still not sure what we're doing, Lord. But if following you is what makes us renegades, then I can live with that.

Your friend, your disciple,
Peter

Dear Jesus,

Maybe it's a bit odd to think about the disciples writing you letters. I'm kind of taking a chance with this sermon, today, and I hope you don't mind (I hope the congregation doesn't mind either).

I've been thinking a lot about the early days of the church. I know what Luke says in Acts but I wonder about all that he doesn't say. I wonder about how those disciples *felt*. You put a lot on them, Lord, those disciples who weren't exactly perfect to begin with. They had to navigate this new life without you for themselves, all while leading huge numbers of people. Were they grieving Judas' betrayal and death? Was Mary upset because none of the guys believed her? How did they handle Peter's leadership? And yet, in the middle of all that, they had to figure out how to make decisions together, how to divide up tasks, how to organize themselves. What did they do before Church Council meetings and a board of trustees? I wonder about the arguments behind closed doors because I can't imagine that they didn't argue some; a large group of people trying to make decisions together is bound to lead to some disagreement. How did they handle all this new responsibility? There was no road map, no ministry plan, no organizational flow chart, no Book of Discipline.

They were outlaws and renegades! People in their own community didn't like what the disciples were doing, especially when the Gentiles started showing up. We have 2000 years of church history to call on, Lord. Wisdom from spiritual mothers and fathers, creeds and councils, thousands of books – all full of guidance for us. These disciples had only three years of training with you and they spent much of that time messing things up. They had to be pioneers, creators, and inventors. I guess the good part of that is no one could say “We never did it that way before.” Everything they did was new and different, an experiment in Kingdom living. But despite their lack of instruction, they never stopped worshipping you, telling your story, breaking bread together.

I'd love to know, Jesus, if the disciples felt clueless and lost. You told them to go make disciples but you really didn't explain the “how” part of that commission. All these years later, we keep quoting Matthew 28 as if we've somehow figured it out. We've even made it our mission statement. But I'm not sure that we know what we're doing now any more than those disciples did 2000 years ago.

Lord, We've just wrapped up another Annual Conference. We celebrated some amazing things this week. We did some hard work and some very good work. But I've spent the week dealing with standing rules and Robert's rules of order. Who is Robert anyway? That part of Annual Conference isn't always fun. The debates and discussions aren't always easy and we don't always act like we know you when we're debating with one another. I'm absolutely sure there were times last week when you just shook your head at what was being said. But we have to have a way to work together because what we do together is far more than anything we could do alone. So we need this Robert guy and his rules even if we don't always appreciate him.

But I wonder if we've come to rely on Robert's rules and parliamentary procedure, budgets and committees too much... We need some structure yes, but in building these structures have we forgotten how to be pioneers and renegades? Have we forgotten how to strike out in faith, to try new things, go new places, meet new people? I wonder if, in our need for order, we've made ourselves a little too comfortable.

It's an interesting season, Lord, in our church, full of doubt and frustration, full of hope and possibilities. We know our world is changing – and changing faster than we can keep up with sometimes. The numbers are staggering, really, of people leaving the church, of people who want nothing to do with us (even if they may still love you). And if we're going to reach people, if we're going to tell people your story, if we're going to go and make disciples, well Lord, I think we're going to have to remember how to step out by faith and not by sight. We're going to have to remember how to be pioneers, inventors, renegades, and yes, even outlaws.

I wonder if we're ready for the work that is before us. I wonder if we could handle putting down the rule book and stepping out in faith. I'm honestly not sure where we go from here or what you'll call us to next.

But I do know this. We can take a step of faith because you have already gone before us. We can be pioneers in the 21st century because you were THE pioneer of our faith. We can go because wherever we go, you have promised to be with us even until the end of the age.

Help us to go, Lord. Give us eyes to see new visions and hearts to dream new dreams. Give us courage to boldly go where no one has gone before, to be renegades and outlaws in your name

Your friend, your servant,
Johannah