

Leader Preparation Guide

Cut to the Heart

Movement Three: The Proposal and Surrender · Acts 2:14-41

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover what the first Christian sermon actually contained by taking it apart line by line, and notice two things the group will not expect: it is almost entirely a report of events rather than a list of instructions, and the demand for a response comes out of the crowd's mouth before it comes out of Peter's.

Catholic Touchstone

The initial proclamation, what the Church calls the kerygma, announces an event before it asks for anything. And the Church proposes; she imposes nothing. Both halves matter tonight, because Catholics tend to fail on one side or the other: either we never make the proposal, or we make it as a demand.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The shape of the sermon

Map it before you lead. Verses 14 to 21 explain the phenomenon from Joel. Verses 22 to 24 state what happened to Jesus of Nazareth. Verses 25 to 32 argue the Resurrection from Psalm 16 and the fact of David's tomb. Verses 33 to 35 establish the exaltation from Psalm 110. Verse 36 draws the conclusion. Verse 37 is the crowd's reaction. Verses 38 to 40 are Peter's answer to their question. Verse 41 is the result.

Peter does issue imperatives before verse 38 -- give ear at v14, hear these words at v22, let all the house of Israel know assuredly at v36 -- but every one of them is an instruction to listen or to recognise. No command to repent or to take a concrete step arrives before verse 38. That distinction is the point, and state it that way.

Two things said in one sentence

Verse 23 is the sentence to slow down on: this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, whom they crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God's plan and real human responsibility, in a single breath, with no attempt to resolve the tension. Note carefully that this is a corporate accusation; CCC 597 says the personal guilt of the participants is known to God alone and forbids laying blame on the Jews of Jerusalem as a whole. Peter does not say they were merely instruments and therefore innocent, and he does not say the crucifixion caught God by surprise. Both stand.

Handle this carefully in the room. The Catechism holds the same two things: the death of Jesus is part of God's plan (CCC 599, 600), and no collective guilt may be laid on the Jewish people, in that generation or any other (CCC 597). And then CCC 598 turns the knife toward us, saying the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the heaviest responsibility, because our sins are involved. Have that paragraph ready, because "you crucified" is a sentence a modern room will react to.

Peter argues, he does not simply assert

Verses 25 to 31 are a real argument. David wrote that God would not let his Holy One see corruption. But David died, was buried, and his tomb is in Jerusalem and everyone listening knows where it is. Therefore he was not speaking about himself. Therefore he was speaking about the Christ.

The premises are a text his audience accepts and a fact they can verify by walking across the city. That is the same structure as the man born blind in Session 6: reason from what your hearer already grants.

Then verse 32: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." The argument from Scripture is joined to eyewitness testimony. Neither alone.

The comparison your group should make

Peter's sermon is roughly a third Old Testament quotation. Paul at the Areopagus in Session 5 quoted none at all, and used Greek poets instead.

Same Gospel, same Resurrection, same call to repentance, two entirely different toolkits, chosen by audience. This is the clearest evidence in the New Testament that starting where people stand is apostolic practice rather than modern accommodation.

Who asks first

Verse 37: "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?"

The verb behind "cut to the heart" carries the sense of being pierced, and describes profound distress or compunction. It does not exclude conviction; it tells you the conviction went in deep.

And notice the order, which is the same order you have now seen three times in this study. Philip made his claim and then invited (Session 1). Jesus let the Samaritan woman ask for the water before he named her life (Session 4). Peter announced who Jesus is, and the crowd asked what to do. In none of these does the demand come first.

And what Peter answers

Verse 38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Verse 39 widens it: the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

Notice what the answer is not. It is not "keep an open mind," not "come to a class," and not "accept Jesus into your heart." It is a concrete, sacramental, communal next step with a name on it.

And verse 40 says he kept going: he testified with many other words and exhorted them. Luke says Peter urged. Luke says he testified at length and urged them directly.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Three quotations doing three different jobs

Joel 2:28-32 explains the phenomenon in front of them. Psalm 16:8-11 supplies the argument for the Resurrection. Psalm 110:1 establishes the exaltation. Tonight's live discovery has the group work out what each quotation is for, so read them yourself first and do not preview it.

Pentecost as a feast

Pentecost is the Greek name for the Feast of Weeks, fifty days after Passover, a harvest festival (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12). Later Jewish tradition associates it with the giving of the Law at Sinai. Whether that

association was already current in the first century is debated among scholars, so if you raise it, raise it as a possibility rather than as background fact.

Three thousand

Exodus 32:28 reports that about three thousand fell after the golden calf. Acts 2:41 reports that about three thousand were added. Readers have noticed the inversion for a very long time. St. Luke does not comment on it, and whether he intends it is genuinely debated. Offer it as something to notice, not as something the text asserts.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on proposing without imposing

St. John Paul II wrote that the Church proposes and imposes nothing, that she respects persons and cultures, and that she honors the sanctuary of conscience.

Read the sentence in both directions before you use it. It forbids coercion, manipulation, and improper inducement, while leaving respectful persuasion entirely intact. It also assumes that a proposal is actually made. Refusing to propose anything is not reverence for another person's conscience; it leaves the conscience with nothing to work on.

St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 39 (1990).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Cyril of Jerusalem on what happens in the water

Instructing candidates preparing for Baptism, St. Cyril of Jerusalem teaches in substance that what takes place in the font is not a symbol standing in for something absent, but a real death and a real birth, and that the water and the Spirit belong together and are not to be separated.

This is why Peter's answer in verse 38 is not a formality tacked onto a conversion that had already happened. The answer to "what shall we do" is a sacrament.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, summarized from his catechetical instructions to those preparing for Baptism. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on the content of the first announcement

Pope Francis wrote that the Church has rediscovered the central place of the first announcement, and gave its content in a single line: Jesus Christ loves you, he gave his life to save you, and he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you.

He adds that this announcement is not one stage among others that we graduate from. It is the first in a qualitative sense, and it has to be heard again and again through every stage of catechesis. Nobody has outgrown it, however long they have been at this.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 164 (2013).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church's own account of what the first proclamation contains, and what it asks for, lives in these paragraphs.

- **CCC 731.** At Pentecost, Christ's Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- **CCC 1226.** From the day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered Baptism, and the Catechism quotes Acts 2:38 as it does so.
- **CCC 1427.** Jesus calls to conversion, and this call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom; in the Church's preaching it is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ.
- **CCC 597.** No collective guilt for the death of Jesus may be laid on the Jews of Jerusalem as a whole, still less on Jews of other times and places.
- **CCC 598.** The Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the heaviest responsibility for the torments inflicted on Jesus, because our sins are involved. Have this ready.
- **CCC 599-600.** The death of Jesus was not the result of chance, but belongs to the mystery of God's plan, and God's eternal plan includes each person's free response to grace.
- Applying this sermon to a conversation over a kitchen table is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Fully visible tonight, and worth savoring silently: the man preaching this sermon denied Jesus three times seven weeks earlier. Do not point it out. Someone will.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Two developments. Verse 37, where they *were cut* to the heart, which is passive. And verse 39, "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." Someone may bring it up. Agree in one sentence, say the question is coming back, and move. Session 8 presses it and Session 9 resolves it. Do not spend it tonight.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Peter is standing in the city where Jesus was executed weeks earlier, addressing the crowd corporately in the second person. Do not claim these particular hearers were present at the execution; Luke does not say so. Note it and move on.

Sealed sheet. Two sessions out. Do not mention it. If someone asks, say only that it is coming.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group discover, by counting, that the sermon is mostly proclamation of events interpreted through Scripture, and that no command about how to respond arrives before verse 38.
2. Land verse 37: the crowd asked first. The demand emerged from them, and this is now the third time in the study they have seen that order.
3. Have them see that Peter argues from what his hearers already grant, and compare his toolkit directly with Paul's at Athens.
4. Establish that the answer to "what shall we do" is concrete and sacramental: repent and be baptized.
5. Work the objection that "the ask" is a Protestant altar call, and land the Catholic version of making a proposal.
6. Move the ladder across its hinge: from listening to speaking. One true sentence, said out loud, to one real person.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung six, the one sentence written down.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:28	Read Acts 2:14-41 aloud in full.
0:28-0:40	Build 1 and 2, what kind of statements these are, and the two things in verse 23.
0:40-0:48	Build 3, the argument from David.
0:48-0:58	Live discovery: what each of the three quotations is for.
0:58-1:04	Build 4, the comparison with Athens.
1:04-1:14	Build 5 and 6, verse 36, and who asks first.
1:14-1:20	Build 7, what Peter actually answers.
1:20-1:26	Build 8, the build-then-press on the ask.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only verses 22 to 41 aloud and summarize the Joel section. Saves six minutes, though it weakens the discovery.
- Drop Build 3 and let the live discovery carry the argument from David. Saves eight minutes.
- Cut Build 4 (the Athens comparison) and hold it for a later leader-led conversation. Saves six minutes, and it is a shame, because it is the cleanest cross-session payoff in the study so far.
- Do not cut Build 6 or Build 8.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Verse 23 and verse 36 will land hard on a modern room. If anyone hears an accusation against the Jewish people, stop immediately and read CCC 597 and then CCC 598 aloud, in that order. The second one is the point: the Church turns the charge toward Christians.

If someone is upset by "God's definite plan" and hears determinism, do not solve it. Say the Church holds both, that CCC 600 says God's plan includes each person's free response, and that the study is about to spend two whole sessions on exactly this. That is true, and it will hold them.

If someone has never been baptized and this session raises it, notice, say nothing in the room, and follow up in the week. Know your parish's OCIA contact before you walk in tonight. This is the session most likely to surface it.

If the room decides that making an ask is pushy, do not argue in the abstract. Ask them what Peter said in

verse 38 and whether it sounds pushy in context. The text is a better advocate than you are.

Discussion Guide

Cut to the Heart

Acts 2:14-41

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, on the day you poured out your Spirit, the first thing your Church did was talk about your Son. Give us that instinct. Loosen our tongues, order our words, and let the people we love hear something that is actually about Jesus rather than about us. And when they ask what they should do, give us the courage to tell them plainly. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you wrote one sentence beginning "One thing I know," and practiced saying it aloud alone. Not the sentence itself: how did it feel to say it out loud in an empty room?

Leader: do not ask anyone to read their sentence. Some will offer. Receive it without evaluating it, and do not improve anybody's wording.

WIN

- ▶ When did somebody last ask you a direct question about your faith? What did they ask?
- ▶ What is the last thing that cut you to the heart? Not annoyed you. Went in.

BUILD

Read Acts 2:14-41 aloud in full. It is long, so give it to a strong reader. Ask the group to listen for one thing on this pass: how much of it is Peter reporting something that happened, and how much is him telling the crowd to do something.

1. Look at verses 22 to 24, the first thing Peter says about Jesus. What kind of statements are these? Now scan forward: where is the first thing he tells the crowd to do?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They are reports. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works, which you yourselves know about. This Jesus you crucified. God raised him up.

The first command about how to respond is verse 38. He does tell them to listen at verses 14 and 22, and to know assuredly at verse 36, so the claim is not that there are no imperatives; it is that nothing before verse

38 asks them to do anything about it. And verse 40 shows he kept going afterward, so verse 38 is not the last word either.

Say this plainly, because most Catholics assume evangelizing means explaining what somebody ought to change. The first Christian sermon is above all an announcement of events, interpreted through Scripture and argued as a case. Something happened, and here is what it was and what it means.

2. Verse 23 says two things in one sentence. What are they, and what does Peter do with the tension between them?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

That Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, and that they crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men. God's plan and real human responsibility, in one breath. Handle the second half exactly as CCC 597 does: it is a corporate accusation, and the personal guilt of individuals is known to God alone.

And he does nothing with the tension. He does not say they were only instruments and therefore innocent, and he does not suggest the crucifixion caught God off guard. Both stand.

Read this to the room. The Catechism holds the same two things. CCC 599 and 600 place the death of Jesus inside God's plan, and say God's eternal plan includes each person's free response to grace. CCC 597 forbids laying collective guilt on the Jewish people, then or now. And CCC 598 turns it toward us: the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the heaviest responsibility, because our sins are involved. Peter said "you." The Church says "we."

3. Verses 25 to 32. Peter is not just asserting the Resurrection, he is arguing for it. Reconstruct the argument. What are the premises?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Premise one: David was a prophet, and knew God had sworn to set one of his descendants on his throne (vv30-31). Premise two: David wrote that God would not let his Holy One see corruption (Psalm 16). Premise three: David died, was buried, and his tomb is a fact Peter can invoke as publicly known. Conclusion: he was not talking about himself, so he was talking about the Christ.

The premises are things his audience already holds: David's prophetic status, a text they revere, and a tomb Peter can invoke as publicly known. And he adds a fourth kind of support at verse 32, apostolic eyewitness testimony.

Then verse 32 adds the second leg: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." Scripture plus eyewitness. Peter uses both, and neither on its own.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them into the text rather than telling them.

Have three people find and read aloud the three passages Peter quotes: Joel 2:28-32, then Psalm 16:8-11, then Psalm 110:1.

Then ask the group to work out, for each one, what job it is doing in the sermon. Give them a few minutes.

What they should find: Joel explains the strange thing happening in front of them, so the crowd is not left thinking these men are drunk. Psalm 16 supplies the argument for the Resurrection. Psalm 110 establishes that Jesus is now exalted and reigning, which is what makes verse 36 possible.

Then have someone estimate the proportion. Roughly a third of this sermon is Old Testament quotation, and none of it is decoration. Every quotation is load bearing.

4. Now compare with Session 5. Peter quotes the Old Testament constantly. Paul at the Areopagus quoted none of it and quoted Greek poets instead. Why the difference, and what does it settle?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The audience. Peter is speaking to devout Jews from every nation gathered for a pilgrim feast, who accept the Scriptures as authoritative. Paul is speaking to Stoics and Epicureans, and does not presume they hold Israel's Scriptures as authoritative.

Same Gospel. Same Resurrection. Same call to repentance. Two completely different toolkits, chosen by who is in the room.

What it settles is the question somebody raised back in Session 3 or 5: starting where people actually stand is not a modern accommodation. It is apostolic practice, and the New Testament preserves both versions side by side so we cannot miss it.

5. Verse 36 is the conclusion of the whole sermon. What exactly is the claim?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Two titles and one identification. The one you executed is the one God has installed as Lord and Messiah. It is a statement about who is currently in charge of the world.

Ask the group what that sentence would cost Peter if it were false, and what it demands of the hearer if it is true. There is no third option available in it, which is the point.

6. Verse 37. What happens to the crowd, and who speaks next?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They were cut to the heart. The verb carries the sense of being pierced, and describes profound distress. It does not exclude intellectual conviction; it tells you where the conviction landed.

And **they** speak next: "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter did not tell them what to do. They asked.

Point at the pattern, because this is the third time. In Session 1, Philip made his claim and then said come and see. In Session 4, the Samaritan woman asked for the water before Jesus named her life. Here the crowd asks before Peter instructs. In none of these does the demand come first.

Then ask the honest question: if we told people who Jesus is more often, how many of these questions would

we not have to manufacture?

7. Verses 38 to 40. What is Peter's answer, and what is it not?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he widens it: the promise is to you and your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

What it is not: it is not "keep an open mind," not "come to a class," not "make a decision in your heart." It is a concrete, sacramental, communal next step with a name on it, and it is addressed to every one of them individually.

And verse 40 says he kept going, testifying with many other words and exhorting them. Luke uses a word that means urging. He testified at length and urged them directly.

8. Someone says: this "ask" business is a Protestant altar call. Making people decide is manipulation, and Catholic conversion is gradual and sacramental. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection protects something real and then draws the wrong conclusion from it.

DIG DEEPER

Three thousand. Exodus 32:28 reports about three thousand fell after the golden calf, and Acts 2:41 reports about three thousand were added. Readers have noticed the inversion for centuries. St. Luke does not comment on it, and whether he intends it is debated. Notice it; do not build on it.

Pentecost as a feast. Pentecost is the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-21), fifty days after Passover. Later Jewish tradition links it to the giving of the Law at Sinai. Whether that link was already current in the first century is debated, so offer it as a possibility rather than as background fact.

Save yourselves. In verse 40 the Greek behind "save yourselves from this crooked generation" is passive in form: be saved. Even the imperative is not finally something they do to themselves.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength, because the person raising it has usually watched the failure mode up close.

Start by granting the strongest version, which is not a caricature: a public, non-coercive invitation to repent and believe, ordinarily followed by baptism and by real discipleship, is a serious and defensible practice, and many people have come to Christ through one. What the objection is really aimed at is the manipulative version of it. Emotional pressure produces decisions that evaporate. Anyone who has worked with young people has met the person who went forward at a retreat, wept, meant it entirely, and was gone in six

weeks. Manufacturing a moment is not the same as making a disciple.

The Church herself warns against this. St. John Paul II wrote that the Church proposes and imposes nothing, and honors the sanctuary of conscience. Pressure applied to a conscience is a real injury, not a technique.

And the ordinary preparation of adult catechumens genuinely is staged by design: the catechumenate takes months by intention. Catholic teaching recognises both an initial conversion and a lifelong one, and it also knows sudden conversions and immediate baptism in some circumstances, so the objection should not be pushed into a claim that gradualness is universal.

On top of that, the demand for a decision often serves the asker. It resolves our anxiety, gives us something to report, and turns another person's eternal life into our result.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: read verse 37 again before you attribute a technique to Peter. He did not stage the moment or work the crowd toward a decision. He told them who Jesus is, and **they** asked what to do. The objection is aimed at a method this passage does not use.

Second: look at what he does once they ask. He does not say keep thinking about it. He says repent, be baptized, every one of you, and receive the Holy Spirit. He gives them a specific next step with a name on it. Refusing to answer that question when someone asks it is not delicacy. It is leaving them standing in the doorway.

Third: verse 40 says he exhorted them, with many other words. He urged. Whatever "proposing rather than imposing" means, it evidently includes urging, because the Apostle does it in the same paragraph.

Fourth: run *Redemptoris Missio* 39 in both directions. The Church proposes, which rules out coercion of assent, though it does not touch her teaching authority or her legitimate discipline. The Church **proposes**, which means something is actually offered. A conscience needs material to work on, and withholding the proposal in the name of respecting conscience gives it nothing to respect.

So the Catholic version of the ask is not an altar call. It is telling somebody the true next step: come to Mass with me, this is what Confession is and here is when it is, let me introduce you to the person who runs OCIA, have you ever been baptized. Concrete, sacramental, and unhurried, and almost none of us ever say any of it.

Give the objector the last word on one point. Making a person into a project, and applying pressure to close them, are real sins against them. This study has said so since Session 1 and will say it again in Session 9. The correction to pressure is not silence. It is a proposal made by someone who will still be there if the answer is no.

SEND

- ▶ If somebody you love asked you tonight, "what shall I do," what would you actually say? Say it out loud now, in one sentence.
- ▶ Which is your failure mode: never making a proposal, or making it as a demand?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 7 of the ladder. The hinge of the whole ladder. Six weeks of listening, and now you say one sentence out loud to another human being.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Say your "one thing I know" sentence out loud to one of the three, this week. One sentence. Not the Gospel, not an argument, not an invitation yet.
- Do not build up to it and do not explain it afterward. Say it, and then let the silence be theirs.
- If they ask a question, answer honestly, including "I do not know" where that is the honest answer.
- If the moment does not come, do not manufacture one. Bring that back next week; it is a real report and there are six sessions left.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are Lord and Christ, and nothing about that depends on whether we say it well. Give us Peter's nerve and Peter's content. Keep us from making people into projects, and keep us from a silence we have dressed up as respect. And when someone asks us what they should do, do not let us change the subject. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?"

Acts 2:37

SESSION 7 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

Cut to the Heart

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
Acts 2:14-41	Primary text, read aloud in full.
Joel 2:28-32	Live discovery. Quoted at Acts 2:17-21 to explain the phenomenon.
Psalm 16:8-11	Live discovery and Build 3. Quoted at Acts 2:25-28 as the argument for the Resurrection.
Psalm 110:1	Live discovery. Quoted at Acts 2:34-35 to establish the exaltation.
Acts 17:22-31	Build 4. Paul at Athens, for the toolkit comparison.
Leviticus 23:15-21	Dig Deeper. The Feast of Weeks.
Deuteronomy 16:9-12	Old Testament Roots. The Feast of Weeks.
Exodus 32:28	Dig Deeper. About three thousand fell after the golden calf.
John 1:41-46	Build 6. Philip's claim followed by his invitation, from Session 1.
John 4:15-16	Build 6. She asked before he named it, from Session 4.