

Acts 2:1-21 Pastor Bill Uetrict 5/20/21 Pentecost

Pentecôte signifie cinquante. C'était une fête juive qui s'est produite 50 jours après la Pâque. À un moment donné, cette fête se réjouit de la récolte, puis devient une célébration de la loi. Pour nous, c'est une journée qui met en lumière le travail de l'Esprit Saint par la parole et l'écoute. C'est un jour qui montre clairement que les mots et le langage comptent.

Are you ready? Whew! You breathe more easily. You were feeling left out. Someone is now speaking your language.

Let's try it again. The word Pentecost means fifty. And the feast of Pentecost itself was a Jewish party that happened fifty 50 days after Passover. At one point this party rejoiced in the harvest and then became a celebration of the law. For us as Christians, it is a day that highlights the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of speaking and hearing. It is a day that makes clear that words and language matter.

About 120 people are gathered in one place. And suddenly, not gradually or slowly, but suddenly, there comes from heaven a sound like the rush of a violent wind. And this wind fills the house where they are sitting. And then tongues as of fire appear among them, and a tongue rests on each one of them. Filled with the energy of God, the Holy Spirit, they begin to speak..speak in other languages as the Spirit gives them ability.

Pentecost is about speaking. Words are significant. They transform people and life. Don't ever believe those who say that words don't matter, that they don't hurt or heal. What we are told by Luke in Acts today is that the early church, fulfilling what the Old Testament book Joel spoke, now is prophesying, preaching, speaking into the real life situations of people, interpreting the work of the Spirit in contemporary scenes and ways, making it clear that these are days of

great consequence (the final days). Note that the Spirit of Joel and the Spirit of Pentecost is poured out on *all* people, men and women alike, old and young the same, slave and free similarly. The power to proclaim is democratically given to all.

Now note. The how of the proclamation is quite significant. The disciples of Jesus speak other languages, languages not their own. The wild Spirit of God moves noisily and rowdily so that those immigrants who live in Jerusalem can hear the message of Jesus in their own language. Pentecost is a language event.

We Americans aren't so good with languages. We live in a big country with a huge land mass. It was easy for many of us for a long time to pretend that everybody spoke our language. And if they didn't, we thought they should. But they don't. And our inability to speak other languages has narrowed our worldview. The Spirit of Pentecost is a Spirit that opens the world up to us, a Spirit that moves us to speak other languages, the languages of *the other*.

You see, until you hear words spoken in your own language, you often don't get what is being talked about. Now I know that much of communication is non-verbal, and I realize that more now than ever, since we have been masking ourselves. But still, when you don't know the language being spoken, you often don't comprehend the message. The message for the early church and for us, that is, the story of Jesus, his death and his resurrection, is such a vital message that it must be spoken so that it can be heard by all. What is happening in our Acts text for today is that folks are being able to speak and folks are being able to hear. Pentecost is a miracle of speaking and hearing. "At this sound, the crowd gathered and was bewildered because each one *heard* them speaking in the native language of each."

The Spirit is at work to bring about speaking and hearing. Trust me. We can't overestimate the significance of hearing, the significance

of knowing that your particularity, your uniqueness is included. Think about the experiences you have had when you come across someone who can relate to what you have been through. They hear you, and you hear good news like you long to hear it. Life is transformed because you are heard and you can hear. Community is formed and nurtured.

William Loader says that the primary meaning of Pentecost is that the Spirit of God is present in human community. The Spirit is present as we speak and are spoken unto, as we hear and as we are heard. Community is not some add-on to life, something that we think about only when we have time. Community is where the Spirit of God takes up residence. The Christian journey is not a private one intended just for us personally or our family. It is a journey of life lived together, infused by the energizing Spirit of God.

And that energizing Spirit is always causing us to speak other languages. The Spirit won't let us be satisfied with our speaking only the language we know. The Spirit is driving us to other people, their stories, their ways of living. Evangelical thinker Gary Chapman in his book **The Five Love Languages** suggests that each of us receives love in a different way. He claims that there are five basic love languages: acts of service, reception of gifts, quality time, words of affirmation, and physical touch. To build up our relationships, Chapman believes, it is essential that we learn what love language others speak. And this is a process of speaking and hearing. The love language I speak is not gifts. While I appreciate gifts, I thrive on quality time and words of affirmation. My wife, perhaps not as much as she used to, really likes gifts and appreciates acts of service. We grow in relationship to one another by learning to speak their language or at least hear and then know their language.

The work of the Spirit of God is always a work of moving us outside of the narrow confines of our little worlds. The Spirit wants to

take us new languages, languages that are not our own so that others can hear good news, and so that others can be empowered to speak good news. Your little language is not the only language in the world. Your little story is not the only story in the world.

The Spirit of Pentecost is not the spirit of smallness or of sameness. On that first Christian Pentecost day there were Jews from every nation, who spoke every language that the world knew. They did not come to the party at Jerusalem looking the same way, acting the same way, speaking the same way, thinking in the same way. They came as diverse people, and the Spirit moved so that all could hear the good news of Jesus in their own language. The Spirit moved so that diverse people were formed into one community, woven together by the message of Jesus. These diverse people brought their own language, and they left with their own language. But nothing was the same again. The Spirit had shaped them into one community.

You know, I am really intrigued by the *language* that Paul speaks of in today's reading from Romans. It really is the language of no language. Sometimes what people coming to us speak, and frankly what we all speak at some point, and what the whole creation speaks, according to Paul, is not a language that can be captured by words. He says, "We don't know how to pray as we ought." Sometimes none of us know what to say, what to speak, what to pray. But the Spirit helps us in our weakness, Paul claims, for the Spirit intercedes [for us] with "sighs too deep for words."

Yes, the Spirit sometimes engenders in us bold speaking, bold speaking in the languages of others. But hear this. Sometimes the best speaking is no speaking at all, for the language we all share sometimes—we are in this together—is the language of not knowing, the language that leads to sighing, groaning, waiting for something to be born.

I remember when I was a chaplain at a hospital in Columbus. I was called in to be with a woman who had lost a very young child. She moaned, screamed, cried, pounding her hands on the table where she sat. She couldn't be consoled. No words from me were going to help. I just stayed next to her, making sure she didn't hurt herself, giving her freedom to share in the groaning that all of creation knows. Somehow in the midst of all of that, God was praying for her. The Spirit was screaming with her.

The Spirit moves to produce words for everybody to hear, words that they will recognize because they are spoken in their own language. And sometimes their language, our language is the language of simply being human, of sighing over life's pain, of waiting for the birth of the new creation out of the old. That's a language that we all speak. That's a reality we all live. And the Spirit is there in the midst of our weakness, weaving us together into one human community.