

As the Spirit Gave Them Ability
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Acts 2:1-21

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’ ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ ¹³ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

²⁶ ‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. ^{4b} I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness

and judgement: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹² ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

Author and marriage counselor Gary Chapman has built a practice around the idea that there are five love languages. He suggests that there are five main ways in which people show love. The language which resonates most with you is your primary love language, be it words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, or physical touch.¹ He stresses that what works best for you is most likely *not* what works for the other person in your relationship, whether it be spouse, child, or parent. Years ago *The Simpsons* television show had an episode where Homer bought Marge a bowling ball for a gift-giving event, knowing she would want nothing to do with it and he would get to keep it. A gift for one person that really benefits the giver more is what we call a “Homer gift” in our family and is the most blatant example of giving in the way you desire to receive. Rarely is anyone so intentional and devious about giving this way but I suspect many of us have bought a gift for someone because we liked it.

According to Chapman, knowing what works best for those closest to us allows us to show them love in ways by which they receive our love most fully. If you connect most with words of affirmation, I would know to tell you that I appreciate you, that I think you have done a great job. If you connect most with acts of service, I’ll clear your plate at a meal or get your car washed. If you connect with quality time, I’ll set down whatever I was working on so you know you have my attention. The intent is the same for each; it’s just that the message is better understood in different ways for different people.

Each disciple spoke about God’s deeds of power, each in a way that could be understood best by another. It prompted people from all over the world to ask, “how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” The list of peoples from different places – Parthians, Medes, Elamites, etc. – was to indicate that people from across the known world were gathered and still received the good news in ways they could understand. They were all gathered because Pentecost was the Festival of Weeks, a harvest festival which followed Passover, and was one of “three major pilgrimage festivals,”² meaning

¹ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010) p. 10.

² *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p. 5.

one of three occasions in a year when Jews who had been settled far from Jerusalem would return to the holy city to celebrate with others and to worship at the temple in the city. The Spirit coming upon the disciples at this time is the equivalent to a well-placed ad during a super football game. All eyes were on Jerusalem. Professor Kristin Emery Saldine suggests “Pentecost celebrates the face of Christ throughout the world in all its theological, cultural, and liturgical diversity.”³ This diversity from the beginning, from the languages spoken to the people gathered, is intended to capture the diversity not only of those who become the church but also the diversity of the gifts given by the Spirit – each behaving uniquely as the Spirit gave them ability

Lest you think I am suggesting that God’s timing was crafty marketing Don-Draper-*Mad-Men*-style, let me be clear. God had throughout history been coming to us in ways which we could understand, no matter who we were or what we looked like. God made God’s self known through burning bushes and stone tablets and wrestling angels and prophets galore. And then...and then...God came to us in an unmistakable way: as one of us, through Christ. Pentecost is a firm continuation of God’s self-revealing. Professor G. Lee Ramsey, Jr. writes, “Pentecost verifies Christmas. All wrapped up in human form, God comes to us in our very own bodies; God speaks to us our very own language(s).”⁴

First, through Christ, God comes to us in our form. Then, through the Spirit, God speaks to us in our language. To return to the five love languages idea, the Spirit speaks to each in the way they can best understand, and does the same for us even today. We call upon the Spirit in the prayer for illumination each week, asking that the Spirit open our eyes to see and ears to hear what God has to show and say to us. We do this trusting that the Word, capital “W” word, will come to us in a way we each recognize, in a way that is as uniquely personal as the lives we are leading and the worries we are carrying. We call upon the Spirit so we might hear answers to prayers offered and we also do this so we might be guided as to what to do and guided to use what skills and gifts we have in order to do what is asked of us.

Professor Emmanuel Y. Lartey says, “Through the power and presence of the Spirit, the church is enabled to be a faithful witness to the presence of God.”⁵ He writes church but it is understood that the church is each of us, individually and together, just as those gathered that first Pentecost. Through the power and presence of the Spirit, those gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks were enabled as individuals and enabled as the body of Christ gathered in that place. This is what Jesus promised them in the gospel of John: once he had left them, the Spirit would come and show them – show them how to live, with God and one another, continuing the work which Jesus began. Jesus says, “He will glorify me,

³ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p. 6.

⁴ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p. 5.

⁵ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p. 24.

because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” We also hear that what is Jesus’ is also the Father’s – “all that the Father has is mine” – so the Spirit declares all that is of God. Jesus explains that the Spirit will come exactly because Jesus has gone.

We read that the Advocate will come, and we only read this in 1 John and in John – the Spirit being called the Advocate. What is lost in that translation of *paraklete* is the literal translation of “one called alongside.” Professor Paul L. Hammer explains that the “‘one called alongside’ [is] to take Jesus’ place after his physical absence and to testify on Jesus’ behalf.”⁶ I’ve talked about today being the day when we are sent to go out and tell, go out and teach. What is important to realize is that we are not asked to do any of this alone. We do not have the physical presence of Jesus, who could only be in one place at one time while on this earth; we have in the Spirit one who is able to walk alongside each and every one of us.

We may not hear the rushing wind today nor see tongues as of fire upon our neighbors’ heads today but the image of Pentecost we read about is not about those markers but instead is about the diverse gifts bestowed, and the diverse people who come together as one through belief in Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost today is also about the diverse gifts bestowed upon each of us and about how we, as very diverse people, come together as one through our belief in Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have been given abilities by the Spirit, and we know there are some people I will connect with better than you might and there are just as many people who might connect better with you than me. Our diversity is a gift and a blessing which allows us to go and share the same message of God’s love in a variety of ways so that a variety of people might hear what we have to share, each in their own languages. So, go out and tell, and do it in your own language.

Let us pray: Lord, send your Spirit upon us and alongside us that we might share your word and your ways with voices and ways that are uniquely our own, we pray. Amen.

⁶ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p. 23.