

Sermon – “In Our Own Languages”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-8, 11b-18

Day of Pentecost and Confirmation Sunday, May 15, 2016

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After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, his followers, no longer called *disciples*, or ‘students’, but *apostles*, or ‘messengers’, have been charged to share the good news. Yet without Christ, they seem uncertain and unsure. Our reading today of the arrival of the Holy Spirit, from the second chapter of Acts, marks the end of their inaction and the beginning of the Christian church in the world. Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.

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?"

11b 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The title of the sermon: “In Our Own Languages”

Text: “...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.” Acts 2:17

Let us pray: Living God, you have created all that is. Send forth your Spirit to renew and restore us, that we may proclaim your good news in ways and words that all will understand and believe. And may the words of my mouth and the mediations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

I was not prepared for this year’s Confirmation class. Though not much bigger than last year’s, the energy level was an easy ten times that of last year. And this was by no means the fault of any one person—instead, the collective simply seemed to generate an exponential, extraordinary, and seemingly impossible amount of energy. In fact, if we could find some way to harness all that

energy, we could easily solve the problem of clean, renewable power for our country—Confirmation class to the rescue!

Up in the Tower Room, there was constant movement, constant conversation, constant questioning, constant enthusiasm, constant sound, [constant attempts to attack one another with the plants that shared the room with us], and constant energy. I left the hour always feeling winded, and somewhat like I had been run over.

Yet every time I found myself getting frustrated, all I had to do was listen. Because in all the noise and apparent chaos, they were never off topic (plant-based attacks aside). Each person had something to say about everything—everything that was said sparked a thought (or fifty) for every person. Each student was fully and constantly engaged. And so conversation was a constant, dynamic, many-threaded, lively, and LIVING event for the entire hour. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

And just think: An upper room, great energy and noise, people speaking over one another, confusion and wonder and bafflement and the sharing of God's presence and marvelous deeds—why, it sounds an awful lot like Pentecost. Gathered together in a room, there was suddenly the rushing of a violent wind, and tongues of fire, and a great noise as each apostle began to speak in a different language. Cacophony, and chaos, and energy—all focused on God.

That sounds almost exactly like what we experienced each week in our upper room—though I am unspeakably grateful that we never encountered even a single tongue of flame. Cacophony, chaos, energy—not just focused on God, but given by God. And as much as some Sundays I might have wanted to beg God and the students for a calmer and quieter Holy Spirit, the story of Pentecost has nothing calm or quiet about it.

As the wind rushes and the flames dance and the apostles pour out from their room into the crowded streets of Jerusalem speaking over and on top of one another in every language, Peter rings out above them all with the first sermon of the Christian church. He quotes from the prophet Joel, declaring of the pouring out of God's spirit onto sons and daughters, old men and slaves—and the giving of prophecies, dreams, and visions. And this is not quiet, or calm: for Joel declares that God will pour out the Spirit upon ALL flesh—not upon just the already loud and powerful, upon those whose voices are given respect and authority, but ALL flesh. God's Spirit will pour out onto children—*your sons and daughters shall prophesy*—and onto the elderly—*your old women and old men shall dream dreams*—and those who have not yet come into their power—*your young men shall see visions*—and those who have no power and never will—*even slaves, women and men, shall prophesy*. The voices of all those silenced by the world shall ring out when God's Spirit pours out. The voiceless will shout of new things, of visions and dreams and prophecies of God's kingdom.

This declaration of the prophet Joel, quoted by the apostle Peter, calls forth cacophony and chaos and energy, restless and relentless and so very threatening to all who profit from the world as it is, to those who would rather everyone just keep silent, to those who are too frightened of God's challenge to the structures and idolatries of our society and culture. For when God's Spirit arrives, it is the children and the elderly and enslaved who will dream and vision and prophesy and shout out the news of God. And I imagine in the face of all the movement and sound and energy we will all feel a little winded, and somewhat run over.

But this is energy at the heart of the church—this is the energy that brought the church to life! This is the energy of the Holy Spirit, constantly moving among us in wind and fire and noise, restless and relentless. And God’s Spirit is for EVERYONE. Not only does Joel declare to us that God’s Spirit will be poured out upon even the least among us, but on the day of Pentecost the apostles spoke in the languages of all assembled. This was no magic trick, no advertising campaign—this was living communication among all God’s children.

We are divided by so much—we build so many walls between ourselves and others—but on Pentecost God’s Spirit rushed in and knocked those walls down. The Holy Spirit brought words of every language to the tongues of each apostle so that every person in the crowd could hear and understand TOGETHER.

Through the Holy Spirit God reaches out to each of us in our own languages—God seeks us out and speaks to us in ways we can understand so that we might understand together. God is not hidden from us. God is not keeping quiet. As water is poured out in our baptism, God pours out the Spirit upon us, the Church, the body of Christ, and animates us. We are baptized by water AND the Spirit, and we are enlivened and energized and brought to life. God’s Spirit is poured out upon ALL of us, God reaches out to each of us in our own language, and calls us each according to our gifts. The Holy Spirit is moving in wind and fire and noise. God is calling. So listen.

[Confirmands, do not lose your energy. Do not lose your engagement. Throughout the gospels the followers of Christ were called disciples, or students—but when the Holy Spirit poured out over them they were called apostles, or messengers, ambassadors, envoys. You have been students—now be ambassadors of Christ. And everyone: be like the confirmands. Wear out your teachers, for the Holy Spirit is moving in wind and fire and noise.]

Be called. Be moved from this room out into the world, as the apostles were moved from their room into the streets of Jerusalem. Be loud. The Holy Spirit strengthened the voices of the young and the old and enslaved in order that the good news of God’s love and justice might be shouted out to all the world. The Holy Spirit spoke in all the tongues of the earth so that all people might hear and understand God’s word together, with walls torn down and divisions overcome. Be energized. God’s Spirit descended upon the Church on that day of Pentecost so many years ago, and it has never left us. See visions. Dream dreams. Open yourself to the Spirit and find the gifts God has given you—find your own language, so that you might prophesy and preach the good news of the kingdom of God where all are loved and known to every person you encounter, and trust that our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will speak through you and bring the whole world to exuberant, abundant, energetic **LIFE!**

Thanks be to God. Amen.