

The rush of a violent wind. The entire house where the disciples have gathered, was filled. Divided tongues of fire - among us, upon us. All, filled with the Holy Spirit. Tongues of fire. Welcome to Pentecost Sunday.

We hear the story every year. We remember it - 50 days after Easter year after year. Like our Lutheran liturgy itself at times, what we hear again and again can become dull to our ears, allowing our attention to drift without consequence. Everything is fine and comfortable. Until it speaks again. And friends, the Day of Pentecost is here and it is addressing you.

That address, that speech: Do you hear what it's saying? No? Is the Spirit speaking too softly? Unlikely given our story. Or does it speak in a language other than your own native tongue?

The Spirit has come, and it is here, transforming disciples into apostles. Apostles, from the Greek *apostolos* meaning "person sent." They were first called to be disciples by Jesus, on the beach, in the countryside, on the streets of towns and cities - "follow me" Jesus would say. The resurrection, though, changed Jesus' speech - from 'follow me', to "as the Father sent me, so I send you." Jesus appears to the disciples in the locked room and declares them "a people sent" (Apostles) - sent to testify to the living Christ as witnesses. But being declared something is not the same as "becoming" something, right - of knowing yourself to be what you've been declared. The disciples needed something more, to see themselves as apostles - they needed language.

Can you identify? I sure can. Whether it's in prayer, giving words of comfort or support, and (especially) in sermon writing, language is a constant struggle for me. And the harder I work at it, the more labored it seems to get. Speaking is scary - the words aren't always right and they don't seem to "get" what I mean. Do you feel the same way? I envy the disciples! The Spirit appears and rests on them - tongues of fire! It fills them and they speak in such a way that people are drawn in.

But as much as this "speaking in tongues" is miraculous, it is not the primary miracle of this story: The miracle here is stated by those who overhear the ruckus when they ask, "*How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native languages?*" Dr. Willie James Jennings, a professor at Yale Divinity School, wrote a commentary on the book of Acts, with the subtitle "The Revolution of the Intimate." "This [story]" he writes, "is first a miracle of hearing..."

The homes of mothers are announced in the mouths of those who were far removed from those mother tongues. This is not generic speech, formal pronouncements, but the language of intimate spaces where peoples inside talk to one another. The hearers [question] a past that does not exist for these followers of Jesus.

What comes from these apostles is speech not only understood - it's the language of mother's, of family. It's the tongue used to tuck you in at night, speaking you to life. This is what the people heard, this is what drew them in: That language echoed in their hearts, their bones. "How is it that we hear," they ask, "each of us, in our own native languages?"

Jesus sent and commissioned the disciples as witnesses when he appeared to them in the locked room after the resurrection. He came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you... As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Today the church celebrates not only the coming of that Spirit, we celebrate the receiving of that Spirit among the disciples and marvel at what it does in and with them. For, when others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine," Peter, with the eleven, stands.

People of Messiah, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say: Jesus has sent and commissioned you too! As disciples yourselves, no less, we gather together in a similarly/seemingly locked room waiting for the world to have an encounter with this living Christ and rush in our doors. Jesus himself comes also to us in this locked room, week after week, pronouncing us apostles - a people sent! But we remain disciples, followers - baffled that Jesus would send us. Over the seven-week-season of Easter, we have been undergoing apostolic transformation with the disciples. But Jesus has now ascended and we are here with a job to do - to make sure we are not the only ones to know about Jesus! Will you too stand, stand with Peter and the eleven and speak as an apostle, as one filled with the Spirit?

This is no easy thing, for hearing the way these bystanders do is not an everyday occurrence. In fact, hearing at all, anything about Jesus or the church, can be hard, especially by people who've been burned by the church, or have heard corrupted ideas about who Jesus is. So Messiah, we must learn to speak "native." But how are we to know the language that strikes people's ears as so familiar that they would hear it as their "native," mother tongue?

Peter, of all the disciples - poor, broken, impulsive and perpetually “behind” Peter - standing with the eleven, speaks words native to the Judeans and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; words from the prophet Joel.

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 prophecy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy...

There is much to say about these words of Joel, words that speak not only to the Judeans but to us also - of our dreams and visions. But what strikes me is that these words are not special words to those hearing them.

It's easy for us all these hundreds of years since the compilation of Joel, since the writing of Acts, to see these words of scripture as mysterious and particularly powerful. Indeed, it's part of the Lutheran tradition to revere the words of Scripture as God's Word. But to the Judeans, these verses from Joel were simply part of the language they spoke. Wouldn't such words (perhaps even these words specifically) have been part of the daily lexicon for a people conquered, occupied, taxed and oppressed by a foreign power? Rome made them exiles and slaves in their own land, made them ashamed of their mother tongue. They must have known such passages from the prophets intimately. And it's these everyday words that Peter turns to in order to explain what was happening, what all the ruckus was about. It was these everyday words Peter used to tell them about Jesus. V31

In other words, Messiah, your words don't need to be special. But they do need to be familiar.

But what's even more important to remember (most important, especially today) is that the speaking in tongues, the inspired speech, the hearing of God's deeds of power in the language native to each listener, and the standing of Peter and the eleven finally as apostles, all of it is the work of this Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Jennings writes, "Before the Spirit came, Peter had little to say." But because of the Spirit's coming and enduring presence, "His words will now and forever be only commentary on what the Spirit is doing, and what God has done for us in Jesus."

So on this threshold of a new and very long season, the season of Pentecost, we make a new start. We stand with Peter and the eleven now as apostles - and we take seriously Jesus' coming near, his gift of the Holy Spirit, and his making of us a "people sent." We will be looking at ways of communicating the good news of Jesus, and the God he has revealed. We'll talk strategy, we'll even do a little practicing. For the Spirit has come to give us not only the words, but the language; not only speech but an ear.

This story sets the tone for the season we begin today. It is the "unfolding story" that will define this season of Pentecost for us - the "unfolding call" Jesus gives to us, out of which he beckons us to the other for the sake of "joining" us to them. For, in Jennings words,

The same Spirit that was there from the beginning, hovering, brooding in the joy of creation of the universe and of each one of us, who knows us together and separately in our most intimate places, has announced the divine intention through the Son to reach into our lives and make each life a site of speaking glory. 32

Thanks be to God

AMEN

(speaking about God's deeds of power)?

What does this mean?

Let this be known to you, and listen to what I say!

Disciples standing

Spirit p 32

But their miraculous tongues are not about the past but about the future, a future shaped by divine desire... [This is] the revolutionary intimacy that will give birth to a belonging that we will call church. This is a revolution of the Spirit always poised to unleash itself at the slightest moment of faithful waiting and yielding.

“Some missionaries... They joined. They showed something in their utter helplessness in the face of difference: they were in a new land to be changed, not just change people into believers. They were there not just to make conquered Christians but truly and deeply make themselves Christian in a new space that would mean that their names would be changed. They would become the sound of another people, speaking the wonderful works of God.”

Jesus sent/commissioned the disciples as witnesses when he first appeared to them after his resurrection. But the disciples remained disciples, followers only, until this day. We read the change here - when “others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine,” Peter, with the eleven, stands. They stand, now apostles, and speak - this is not new wine.

This is the day we, the Church, mark the coming of the Spirit and its wholly disturbing and transforming the disciples into apostles. But in the midst of that drama it's easy to miss that this Spirit-inspired speech met the ears of its listeners in their “own native tongue.”

ACTS Willie James Jennings p27-36

A community broken open by a “sheer act of God” (Us too)

Moment of creation (God does this alone)

The Spirit creates joining - languages (Intimate | Hearing)

...began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability

First Christian Sermon - Pet (Miracle of speaking)

Commentary on what the Spirit is doing,

and what God has done for us in Jesus

Joel reading - slaves prophesying (underbelly of roman economic control)

We have now a “real God in real time who is working in the concrete histories of people.”

Peter “declares the sameness of Jesus with all human beings

“God who is greater than death”

Who would believe it? “There would be no chance of success unless the Spirit of the living God breathed on their witness. Thankfully, now the Spirit has appeared, living and breathing on and through unlikely voices, voices just like ours.”

Our dreams and visions

ACTS 2

All together in one place (The 12)

each one heard them speaking in the **native language** of each

at this sound : wind and languages (Miracle of hearing)

How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own languages (speaking about God’s deeds of power)? What does this mean?

Filled with new wine... (hiding/shielding/defending themselves from...)

Disturbing, unsettling, startling spectacle (Fear?)

Peter: Let this be known to you, and listen to what I say!

Disciples standing

17-21 This is not what THEY were speaking, but what was once spoken...

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

GENESIS 11

build ourselves a city and a tower... a name for ourselves
(avoid being scattered)

God sees: one language, one people, only the beginning of what they'll do

Confuse their language - not understand one another

Scattered abroad by God or confusion?

(Challenge to God's command to fill the earth 1:28)

- to take care of the earth

- God challenges isolationist perspective, promotes diversity

ROMANS 8

Children of God, led by the Spirit

No longer slavery to fear - but a spirit of adoption

That Spirit bears witness that we are children of God

- Heirs, jointly with Christ
- Suffer with him

PSALM 104

When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face
of ground

JOHN 14

Satisfy us ...and we will be satisfied.

Do you still not know me?

"Show us the Father" (Oneness of the Father and Jesus - mutual 'in-ness')

Believe me, or believe me because of the works themselves.

The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these

If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

(When you see me, you see the Father)