

## **Pentecost Sunday**

**May 23, 2021**

**Acts 2:1-21**

**Pastor Ann Hultquist**

I'm going to ask for a show of hands this morning; don't worry, this is not an intense faith question! How many of you have studied or tried to learn another language?...For many of us, this happened in middle school or high school--funny to think about it now, but in my junior high we had the options of Spanish, French, or *Russian*--(I imagine there was a concern about who might take over the world.) I took Spanish in 7th grade, and my sole speaking ability has boiled down to "Eman, Eman, aqui viene Eman," which is really only handy if you want to tell someone your dog Eman is coming...

In high school and seminary I got better at German, but still, not fluent--So, here's the second question: How many of you can speak another language today?...You have to use it or lose it, right; and we don't have a lot of opportunity or take a lot of opportunity in the U.S. to practice. Old joke: Call someone who knows two languages? Bilingual. Three languages? Trilingual. One language? An American. We are unusual among world citizens, because in most countries people do speak and understand multiple languages/dialects.

Wind time back a couple thousand years --It was the 50th day after Passover in Jerusalem and the festival of Pentecost was being celebrated. For Jewish believers, it was a time to give God thanks for two things: the first wheat harvest of the year, and the giving of the law to Moses. Thousands of people would have been gathered to worship--people who spoke/understood more than one language, for sure. You had to in order to do business, trade, or just get by.

Many spoke Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke; some knew Greek; others who were well educated knew Latin, the language of the Romans. Among their own family or group, people spoke their mother tongue. Can you imagine the cacophony of language on the streets in Jerusalem during the festival? It must have been an overwhelming and joyful time--greeting family and others you hadn't seen

in awhile, sharing stories and meals and singing psalms together as you made your way up to the Temple.

Jesus had told the followers to wait. Wait in the city until the Spirit, the Advocate, the Helper would come. It was more than 12 disciples that were gathered together on this day--in the previous chapter unnamed women, Jesus' brothers and mother are all part of the gathering--waiting, watching, wondering what will happen. How astonished they all were when the wind rushed through the house, and fire danced on their heads, and that cacophony became something different: with words powerful enough to be heard on the street, they told the story of Jesus in dozens of languages.

Imagine the explosion of sound. Imagine your wonder at hearing *your* mother tongue speaking directly to you, not telling you to be something or to do something but telling you of your worth in God's eyes and of the hope and love that Jesus embodied; which was being lavished on all--**all** people, regardless of age, gender, or social class. The Holy Spirit was not interested in division, but in unity, not in erasing differences in language or culture or people, but working in and through them.

These scriptures and this celebration today is an interesting juxtaposition--putting it side by side with what we are all experiencing now. We are re-learning, aren't we, what it means to gather together again--not just in faith communities, but everywhere, and with everyone. We are not the same people we were in March 2020, are we? The pandemic, with its isolation and worry and devastating illness has changed each of us in some way; not to mention the ways pervasive racism has been laid bare all around us; and in the background divisive politics. Where do you even begin with this changed life? What do you say?

The verses from Romans today remind us that *we* have a story to tell to our groaning world. Like learning any language, we need practice, we have to practice what to say and how we say it. It's not a story just about us, but we--each of us--bear and experience the life, love and presence of Jesus in our own way. And so we each can tell a unique story, in our own 'language' that someone needs to hear.

What would you say? How would you tell about "God's deeds of power" as they did that first Pentecost? We don't have to be eloquent, or theologically perfect, *or* be so afraid of offending someone; not if we are *also listening* and speaking from the gentleness and hope in our hearts.

Can you say something about the love of Jesus for **all**--no exceptions? Would you share a dark valley where the Shepherd never left your side? Can you embrace another by sharing your own doubts? Would you stand with someone, walk with someone whose life has fallen apart, living out Jesus' patient love? We have a hope, grounded in Christ, that people long for. In all of this, the Spirit is moving in you--in us, as promised.

The language apps--Babble, Duolingo--say that 30 million people around the world attempted to learn a new language during the pandemic. Who knows how many were able to actually learn enough to understand someone and to speak with them? But why not use a language we *do know* this Pentecost--to tell something about the amazing love of Jesus...