

## Pentecost Sermon

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### Text

#### Acts 2:1-21

<sup>2</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

<sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

<sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>"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. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs

on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Prayer

Sermon

In my 20s I worked for a software company that merged with another company, and I was the lucky one to go to the Holland office to train them on our platforms. While I was there I got to explore Amsterdam. One sunny afternoon I meandered around the city without a particular destination in mind and I found myself in the midst of a street festival of some sort. People were singing and dancing and shouting, there were folks in outlandish costumes, folks kept pressing flyers into my hands - flyers, of course, in Dutch. There were guys walking around on stilts, calling out to the crowd. This was amazing. At one point, one of the guys on stilts did that circus thing and blew fire out of his mouth. Fire. This was the wildest thing my 23 year old self had ever seen. I couldn't wait to tell my family about this. The Rijksmuseum and Rembrandt? Whatever. This would be what I'd write home about.

I got back to my hotel room and turned on the English language news station. And guess what I saw on the news?

Largest labor protest in Europe in decades...

I pulled out my emergency international calling card to let my family know I had not been arrested in Amsterdam.

Sometimes it's really important to understand people's words.

The Holy Spirit gave, on the Pentecost day, not only the ability to speak in many languages but the ability to hear and understand one another. When we read this story literally, it's pretty exciting: folks from all over the ancient near east could understand each other. The Spirit gave Peter and his cohort tongues to speak many languages and the crowd could understand their words.

“And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?”

And we know that after a little astonishment and questioning of sobriety, folks started listening. It's all well and good that the crowd could grasp what Peter was saying but it's much more important that they listened and understood and were moved by it.

A gift and invitation of today's Pentecost might be to listen for understanding to the experiences of others. What question is the Spirit leading you to ask someone: what has this year been like for you? What do all of the changes of the past few weeks feel like for you? As we consider the possibility of gathering close by to one another safely, will we be like those folks, “<sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites....and visitors from Rome....members and friends and visitors from all over - will we listen for understanding to the joy of shared meals and the anxiety of unmasked faces? Will we pay attention to folks with family in places where this is not over?

And will we listen for God's word in this time? For a long time the UCC has offered this wisdom: God is still speaking. God is still speaking to us.

The disciples, and we, through this story, learn that even when it seems like things are quieting down, even when it seems like we are past the climax, the high point in the story, God has surprises in store. God is still speaking. Even when we think we've discovered and used all our gifts, God gives us new gifts. Just when we think we've spoken to everyone God wants us to speak to, God gives us the gift of new languages, so that we can speak with yet more people about God's love and mercy and creativity.

God is still speaking, and our job is to listen, using the Spirit's interpretive power, to God and to our neighbors.

We think so often of the Holy Spirit inspiring us individually, but what does it mean to be inspired as a church? How are we listening for understanding as a church community? We might want to consider, on this Pentecost two thousand years later, language as a metaphor for all human connections. Galileans were able to speak to Elamites, Egyptians, Cretans, and be understood, because they were listening. Today, native English speakers from the US can speak to Portuguese speaking folk from Brazil and be understood. Lexingtonians can speak to New Yorkers and be understood. Poor folk can speak to rich folk, and be understood. Jews can speak to Christians, and Christians can speak to Muslims, and be understood. Old folks can speak to young folks, and be understood. Cisgender folks can speak to non-binary folks, and be understood. African-American folks can speak to white folks and be understood. Women can speak to men, and be understood. Communication is the foundation of respect. And listening is the foundation of communication.

That afternoon in Amsterdam, I was just a tourist in town, wide eyed and taking in the sights. It never even occurred to me to wonder what was going on for the people in that place whose language I did not understand. I kind of wish I could go back to that afternoon in Amsterdam and find someone whom I could understand, and ask what was on their mind, what they were worried about, what they were asking for. Who knows what connections the Spirit might have been able to build?

Who might the Spirit help you connect with this Pentecost?