

A Pentecost Homily
For Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
June 5, 2022 - Pentecost

Text: Acts 2:1-12

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

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

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2nd Corinthians)

There was a little boy wandering the hall.

I did not speak his language and he did not speak mine.

Someone went to find his mom and I pulled out the universal language of the two year old, the crayons and paper.

Colores, he asked?

Si, I said.

Verde, he asked?

Green! I said.

But what I was trying to say was:

You are safe, I will stay with you.

He sat with me and colored for a while. And then his Mama was found.

There was a woman in a bed, and an aide helping her, across the hall from where I was visiting someone. As my visit ended, I started praying the Lord’s Prayer...and in four different accents we all joined in to the familiar words and the familiar rhythm.

There was a choir singing, Thuma Mina, Thuma Mina...I did not know what the Zulu words meant at the time - but the Spirit was in the singing and I understood...Send me, Jesus.

Some folks say Pentecost was the Spirit undoing Babel and bringing back together a broken and divided human kind. On the other hand, Eric Barreto (of the Narrative Lectionary Podcast), says it is not Babel reversed – if it were, everyone would speak the same language. Instead, here God in Spirit learns all our languages and speaks to us in our own heart language, meets us where we are, bridges language and culture to bring us good news. Barreto and his colleagues say that when we manage to connect with people who are very different from us – it is the Spirit connecting us. I love this interpretation. Language, you see, has the power to divide us. It's really easy to stick to your own language. We are divided by culture, we are divided by class, we are divided by language, whether we speak English or Spanish, Arabic or Russian, whether we speak abstractly or concretely, whether we speak technically or artistically, whether we speak orthodoxy or orthopraxy, whether we tell a story or ask a question, whether we speak justice or comfort. What a gift that the Spirit might have a way to intervene when we do not have connecting words. What a gift that the divine divided tongues as of fire loosened and brightened the tongues of Peter and his companions. In the Pentecost moment, the Spirit helped the early church to find a way to share God's love with many different groups of people. How amazing, to suddenly be able to effectively communicate with one another? How amazing ,to bridge great divides?

Here is the other gift of the Holy Spirit that I would highlight for you: the Holy Spirit means we are not static. Pentecost gave the church the ability to adapt. “Until this moment in history, the faith known as the Way is an assemblage of eleven refugees from Galilee.” (Gary V.Simpson, African-American Lectionary Commentary) Until this moment the story, however dramatic, was history. The child was born, the man did preach, the teacher did heal, the prophet did die on the cross, Christ was resurrected. And only a small number of people knew it, and the lessons would have passed away with them. The Pentecost moment meant that Jesus' love and compassion, the hope of new life, the communion meal that he inaugurated, would spread across culture and language, would become new in each place and each era.

We like to be steady and stable. We are not always eager to change. “While I've never heard someone actually pray 'Come, Holy Spirit, that we might remain exactly as we are,' that's often how we act.” (David Lose, “Pentecost Change”) But the blessing of the Holy Spirit is that She made the story perpetual and dynamic. It is possible to share the good news of Jesus’ love and justice with Parthians, Medes and Elamites, with folks from Waltham, Arlington, Woburn and Lexington. It is possible that the Word is relevant to the justice questions of 1st Century Palestine and 21st Century Boston. It is possible, too, that this Holy Spirit can do a little translating in our own hearts. It is possible that the great Voice / Breath / Wind / Dove / Fire - Ruah in Hebrew, Pneuma in Greek - can provoke us and move us. Can comfort us when change is too hard and advocate for change when it is needed. Can make the Good News something new and good here in this place. Amen.

Benediction: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.