

“EACH IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE!!”

DAY OF PENTECOST--B

May 24, 2015

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

PENTECOST JOKE:

The Pentecost genius award goes to the worship leader who thought it would be a really spectacular closing for an outdoor Pentecost service. It would help them imagine the Holy Spirit descending from the heavens.

He arranged for a plane to fly over and release dozens of birds right over the gathered congregation.

“You get to decide which kind of bird,” he told the pilot.

The worshipping folks didn’t quite get the spiritual lift the worship leader hoped for.

“Wow,” exclaimed the pilot afterwards. “I thought turkeys could fly.”

TEACHING POINTS:

1. Speaking and hearing in our own language.
2. The “miracle of Pentecost”.
3. Thanks giving for those who spoke the Gospel in “our” language.
4. Oscar’s story. (From: Rev. Adrian Dieleman in “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Via “e-sermons”).
5. God’s surprising work in a new way.

THE MESSAGE:

One of the fun stories I like to tell comes from my internship experience as a hospital Chaplain at City Hospitals in Memphis Tennessee. It involved a time when I was speaking with a patient who liked to fish. He was telling me about “cay poe” fishin’. I wasn’t making the connection because I had never heard of a “cay poe” fish. Finally, he said it very slowly “ca(n)e po(l)e” fishin’”, and it all made sense. Then we could talk because I’d done a fair bit of cane pole fishing in my youth. It was amazing what happened when we began to understand each other in a common language.

You know those times when there was a lack of understanding. When things just didn’t make sense. All of us have experienced times when we felt left out because we couldn’t understand. Perhaps it was a time on a trip among people of another culture or race where the conversation was simply chatter. Or a time when you were trying to communicate with a person who had a totally different frame of reference or language. Or maybe it was a time when there was just the proverbial “failure to communicate”, maybe on the job, or in a disagreement with a loved one.

All of these highlight for us how important it is when we can communicate in a common language. How wonderful it is when we can understand each other.

This is the “Day of Pentecost”. This is the “birthday” of the Christian Church. This is a celebration of the fact that God comes to us, as many and varied as we are, to open us up to God’s story,

You see, what is most amazing to me about the day of Pentecost. What is most amazing to me from the revealing of God’s story is not that God came into that place “like the rush of a mighty wind.” There had been mighty winds before where God’s power was revealed — a mighty wind blew over the waters at creation and God spoke to Ezekiel in the rush of “the four winds” over the valley of dry bones. What is amazing to me from the revealing of God’s story is not that there were ‘tongues as of fire” resting among them. God had revealed God’s self in fire before—in a burning bush in the wilderness with Moses.

What is the most amazing is that each one of the people there heard the story of God in their own language. Each person, each and every person, people from every end of the earth, heard and understood the power and force of God in a language they understood. There was no “breakdown of communication”;

Capture this miracle with me. In Acts, the listing of the nations, Partheans and Medes and Elamites, is the writer’s way of saying that people representing the whole world were there. The peoples and nations cited are at the edges of the known world. It is a widely varied group of people, thousands of Jewish heritage who had gathered for the Feast of Pentecost—one of the times that the devout were obliged to come to the temple for the celebration.

There, too, in that place, were the disciples of Jesus waiting for the final revealing of God. Remember when Jesus ascended, Jesus told the disciples to go back to Jerusalem and “wait” for the revealing of the Holy Spirit.

So, gathered here is this wonderful collection of people. People with different hopes and expectations. And yet, all were touched by God, “in their own language”. They all were able to tell and to hear God’s story!! God touched those who heard and those who spoke. They were all party to a gift, to the gift of God. And they all had a part to play. They all were in a miracle where God was present “in their own language.”

This is the miracle. People touched by God in a language that they could understand. In turn, people telling others about God and God’s power in languages they could understand, by God’s spirit.

Think with me about the people who spoke to you in the language that only you could understand at the time. Maybe it was a parent, or a teacher, or a pastor, or a neighbor or extended family member. Recall, when it was that the Gospel first made sense. Recall how it was that someone spoke to you “in your language.”

For me, one who spoke my language was Pastor Fred Ollendorf, who I first met at Church camp bouncing on the cots in our cabin. At the time it was a language that a teenage boy could understand in a unique way. God’s love. God’s fun. Acceptance and forgiveness, bouncing on a church camp cot. That language was followed by the language of others who had heard and could communicate. Of others who

understood the story of God and could translate it into a language that I could understand.

Think for a moment about the people in your life who have spoken the language of God, who have translated God's amazing grace to you in ways that you could understand, in ways that you could receive. Who were the people of God to make God real for you? Just take a moment to remember them, and give God thanks for them. They are a part of the miracle of your faith and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life today.

How about this: at least one of the ELCA Synodical websites has enabled a "Google Translator" to translate the page into one of 91 possible languages. Telling His story in their language.

There is, however, another piece to the story, another piece to the miracle. It is the piece where we tell others the amazing story in the language of their life. Where we share the gospel miracle in the language of those around us.

Think about how you might do that. What is your language for the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Perhaps it is in the form of touch—healing touch, caring touch, the touch of acceptance. Or perhaps it is in the form of action—putting your faith into action as you work for justice, or try to make a change in the world. Or perhaps it is in the form of knowing how to relate the Gospel in words that a child, or an alienated adult can comprehend.

Part of the miracle of Pentecost is that others hear us in their language. A big part of the power of the Spirit is the motivation to "go and tell" in their (not our!!) language. Stop and ask for God's leading in this part of the miracle on this Day of Pentecost!!

Oscar Cervantes is a dramatic example of "each in their own language". As a child, Oscar began to get into trouble. As he got older, he was jailed 17 times for brutal crimes. Prison psychiatrists said he was beyond help. But they were wrong! During a brief interval of freedom, Oscar met an elderly man who told him about Jesus. Hearing the Gospel "in his own language", Oscar placed his trust in the Lord and was changed into a kind, caring man.

Shortly afterward Oscar started a prison ministry. Chaplain H. C. Warwick describes it this way: "The third Saturday night of each month is 'Oscar Night' at Soledad. Inmates come to hear Oscar and they sing gospel songs with fervor; they sit intently for over 2 hours; they come freely to the chapel altar . . ." Oscar, having understood, is speaking to others in "their own language."

The Pentecost power, fire, wind and language should not be a "controlled burn". It should blaze in us and illuminate in a surprising way forward. Pentecost wasn't about predictability. Pentecost was about surprises and God at work in new way. Doubt and fear had to do with predictability. Mystery and renewal is God at work.

The miracle of Pentecost is "in their own language". Both hearing and telling. May God bless us with the spirit to understand and be understood as tellers of the Gospel story.

Amen.