

Pentecost B 23 May 2021  
Acts 2:1-21  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

*Gratia Domini nostri Iesu Christi et caritas Dei et communicatio Sancti Spiritus cum omnibus ⁊ vobis.* Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with ⁊ you all. Amen.

*Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. . . . Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? . . . in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." Let's pray:*

There're times in each of our lives when we begin to hear a new language. Although new, it somehow echoes with familiarity. We know it through our deepest longings and desires. It fills us with hope, life, and peace. At those times, we hear our "native language." Our own native language describes, reveals, and makes present the deeds of God's power in our lives. That's the miracle and gift of Pentecost.

We hear our own native language the day:

- we fall in love and find that our lover's voice doesn't just communicate information but speaks presence, union, and oneness.
- we realise that although we can hear the birds, they no longer chirp; rather, they sing a familiar song.
- we become aware that the wind doesn't just blow through the trees but now whispers stories of our future.
- we discover our vocation and know that we are living the life to which God has called us.
- a voice reassures us, saying, "This is your place."

- we experience joy-filled creativity and we wonder, “Where did that come from? How did I do that?”
- the still, small voice of God speaks in the midst of sorrow and loss and says, “I’m here. It won’t be easy but you’ll be okay,” and somehow we have the strength to get up and face the day.

Our native language is the voice of compassion that enables us to care for others. It’s a word of encouragement that points the way, a word of truth that causes us to repent, a word of peace we embody as a reconciled relationship. Pentecost is that moment when all of creation speaks.

These are the moments of Pentecost, moments when we know God is not just with us or around us but within us and we are somehow different; more real, more alive, more whole. These aren’t the things we usually associate with the story of Pentecost. Instead, we listen for a sound like the rush of a violent wind to come from heaven and fill our entire house. We look for divided tongues, as of fire, to appear and rest on us. We wait to speak in another language.

Sound, tongues, and languages are how St Luke describes the day of Pentecost. They’re the images we most often associate with Pentecost but they’re not the story of Pentecost. We sometimes confuse the images and the story. It’s easy to do because the images are so vivid, so powerful, so different from ordinary, everyday life. With their power, however, comes danger.

The danger is that we idolise these images and use them as measures of faith. Everyone knows that there’re “Super Christians” who seem to be able to speak and pray in tongues at will. Those who have the Holy Spirit popping in as a regular house guest. Those for whom dividing tongues, as of fire resting on them, is so common as to be pedestrian. We all know super Christians like this, don’t we, as opposed to mundane, everyday Christians like you and me?

This is what happens if we allow the images to define and identify rather than point and invite. When that happens, the images lose their power and purpose. They take us nowhere and Pentecost becomes a single event in history; unique, limited, and seemingly unavailable to us. But, the sound,

tongues of fire, and languages aren't the keepers of Pentecost. They merely point to Pentecost.

When we search beyond these fantastical images, we find that Pentecost is happening all of the time, in all places, and in all circumstances. We hear in our "native language." We realise that Pentecost isn't a sound like the rush of a violent wind. It's not divided tongues, as of fire. It's not speaking in other languages. In and of themselves, these things have no significance. They're meaningless. Their meaning is found only in hearing.

Hearing is what "amazed and astonished" on the day of Pentecost. People weren't amazed and astonished at the sound of wind, the flaming tongues, or the foreign languages. They were amazed and astonished, asking, "How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

That means that Pentecost is more than sound, tongues, and languages. They're just the images of Pentecost. I'm not suggesting the images of Pentecost aren't real but that they're more real than we know. They empower us to open ourselves to an invisible world, to cross old boundaries, to be a different way, and to live a new life. They make us "capable of God." Now, what do I mean by that?

Do you remember what resurrected Jesus says to the apostles a little earlier in [Acts 1:4,5]? 'While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." "You will be baptised with the Holy Spirit", or, in other words, you will be made "capable of God."

Ultimately, that's what Pentecost is about, being "capable of God." That's not our doing. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes each of us "capable of God." The Holy Spirit gathers us together into a community of faith and fellowship. The Holy Spirit gathers us together into the body of Christ, also known as, "the Church."

If you want to know when you were made “capable of God” then go to the place where you hear in your own “native language.” There you will hear the story of God’s presence filling your life. It’s a story of love, hope, joy; a story of patience, gentleness, courage, and peace; a story of mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation; a story of wisdom, creativity, and wonder; a story of healing, life, and resurrection.

Where is this place? Friends, you need look no further than your baptism! When you were baptised, you were made “capable of God”. You received the gift of faith and Jesus imputed his righteousness to you. You were made holy. You became, Church. You were Pentecosted, if you like, by the Holy Spirit.

And we know, or should, that baptism is an ongoing, daily event in our lives. As we hear from Luther’s Small Catechism: ‘[Baptism] means that our sinful self [the old Adam], with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self [new creation] should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity for ever.’

Saints, the Pentecost story can only be heard in our “native language”; the language of God. It’s not a story the world can tell because the world tells an aimless story in a foreign, unintelligible language. Our “native God language” describes the deeds of God’s power in our lives. We live the story of our Pentecost, our being made “capable of God.” By his mighty deeds, his power, his work, his immortal grace, his command, his will, his still, small voice, his very breath, we are baptised and have our very being and salvation. By his Holy Spirit, God calls everything together into fellowship.

Please repeat after me, “We are baptised! . . . “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” . . . “We are Church.” . . . “Every day we are being Pentecosted!” . . . Indeed, we are, my dear brothers and sisters, to the glory of God, our Father. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.