

Pentecost – Acts 2: 1-21

Intro: Since at school, I found learning language is difficult. ... anyone like to share your experience learning new language ?

How can we speak to each other beyond communicating in the ordinary languages that we know?

When the Evangelist, Luke, describes the first Pentecost, he tells us that, after receiving the Holy Spirit, the first followers of Jesus came out into public and began speaking and, everyone, absolutely everyone, no matter their ethnicity or language, heard the disciples' words as if they were in their own language.

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs

The language given by the spirit transcended ethnicity and native tongue. It is too easy for us to simply write this off as a miracle, an exceptional foundational intervention by God which helped found the church. That may also be true, but there is another point to this: Language functions at different levels. At its most obvious level, language depends upon the spoken word and that word is always in a particular language, e.g., French, English, Spanish, Chinese. At this level words have a relative power, but they can also deceive and lie. Words don't always accurately mirror the heart. Moreover, they invariably fail us just when we most need them, especially in depth situations where tragedy, suffering and death.

But we have other languages: Beyond the spoken word there is body language. Our bodies speak louder and more honestly than do our words. Through our bodies and through its gestures we speak more deeply and more truly than we do with our words.

And we have still yet a deeper language: More deeply than through the body. We speak through the spirit, through the language of the Holy Spirit, a language that transcends the spoken word and the language of our bodies.

Why didn't God mark the initial outpouring by something more glorious than the ability to communicate with others without a translator?

The answer lies in the story of the Tower of Babel, told early in Genesis not so long after the Fall. The people building the Tower of Babel all spoke one language; but they used the power that the commonality of language gave them for evil, to build a tower that reached to heaven. God defeated them by the simple multiplying their languages and leaving them unable to understand each other.

Now, in the new age, Christ offers all people salvation from their sin, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this age of the Spirit-filled church, all human beings are invited into communion with God and with each other. Human beings can be trusted with unity when they are incorporated into the one body of the Lord.

And maybe that is why God marks the beginning of the reign of his Spirit in the Church by overturning the Babel of human language. Filled with the Holy Spirit, human beings can be given again what they lost at the Tower of Babel, not for storming heaven, but for proclaiming the kingdom of heaven on earth.

This is what I called the language of the spirit.

Scripture tells us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is very real in life, for example: inside of charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and love. These we hope speak through us more loudly and clearly, either in their presence or their absence.

We live and communicate with the language of the Spirit. We hear beyond spoken words, bodily gestures, and beyond what we explicitly intend to say to each other.

The miracle of Pentecost is not just about the ability to speak different languages but the ability to listen with our hearts and spirit.