Sermon, June 5, 2022

Acts 2: 1-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy Pentecost! Today is the day we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Our paraments have been changed to red, the color of the Spirit. Some of you are wearing red to celebrate the presence of the Spirit among us.

Pentecost is not just a New Testament event. The word Pentecost comes from the Greek word meaning “50th day.” It was originally a Jewish feast that concluded 50 days after Passover. It celebrated the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. The Jewish people also celebrate the gift of the law to Moses at Mount Sinai on Pentecost.

We often call this the birthday of the church. Occurring 50 days after Easter, it marks the day the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples following Jesus’ resurrection. The disciples immediately went out and preached Jesus’ message to everyone. Thus began the church, the body of Christ made up of believers.

Jesus had instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem to wait for something special from God. This Advocate would be a teacher and a comfort for them. It would remind them of all that Jesus had taught them and would continue to teach them everything they’d need to know. It would comfort them with the peace that Jesus conferred on them following his resurrection.

As the disciples gathered in a house, there came a sound like a rushing wind. Tongues like fire appeared in the room and rested on each of them. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, had arrived!

The first gift of the Spirit was the gift of language. It wasn’t to make the disciples more eloquent, but to make them speak the languages of all people. It was as if one of you suddenly could speak Spanish when you go to a Mexican restaurant or Mandarin at a Chinese restaurant. Think how easy it would be to order!

This gift was the reversal to an Old Testament story about language. When people spoke one language, they conspired to build the tower of Babel. This tower would enable them to climb to the heavens, to meet God face to face.

When God sees what they are doing, he confounds their speech, making them speak different languages. They are no longer able to understand each other so they abandon the building of the tower.

Now at Pentecost, the different languages come to the fore. The languages no longer divide the people, but unite them. Jews from every nation were in Jerusalem. Even with a common religion, they spoke the language of their home towns. This is where we get the favorite reading for every lector in the world….the list of every location they had come from.

Those who heard them knew they were Galileans. How could they be speaking in so many different languages? They were amazed and perplexed.

Of course, the cynics show up. They must be drunk. Peter stands up and speaks for all the disciples. He assures the naysayers that they are not drunk. It’s only nine o’clock in the morning. Maybe not the best reason, but then accusing them of being drunk makes even less sense. Being drunk probably makes you struggle with your own words, not to be able to speak other languages.

Peter uses the words of the prophet Joel to explain what is really happening. The disciples are not drunk, but are the fulfillment of the prophecy. They are the first recipients of the Holy Spirit, promised long ago.

This Spirit is not just for Peter and the 11 who stand with him. This is just the beginning of a new age, when the Spirit will be poured out on all people. As the Spirit descends on sons and daughters and young and old men, men and women slaves, the word of God will spread across the world. It is a word for all people, all nations, all languages.

The idea of language has always fascinated me. There are thousands of languages around the world. How do our ears hear certain sounds and our minds know what those sounds mean? How did words come about and why do they differ so much? Or don’t differ at all?

Our English word for no is the same in Spanish. No. But our English word for chair is silla in Spanish. Not even close.

I’ve had the opportunity to travel to several places where English is not the first language of many people. I went to the Northwest Territories in Canada with On Eagles Wings several years ago. In the remote village of Whati, all of the younger people and children speak English, but many of the older people do not.

Our team was there on a very important day in the community. It was Treaty Day. This is a day when every indigenous person gets money promised in a treaty from many years ago. Children especially were excited because they could take their money and go to the community store to buy soda and chips. Adults came probably more for the tradition of it. Every person got $5.00.

The transaction was done by a government official and presided over by a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the RCMP. Wearing his proper uniform, it was quite the photo op.

We had our picture taken with him and then with a family who had come together for their payment. We had the RCMP take our picture with this family. A couple of the Bible Camp children, their parents and a grandfather. The grandfather did not speak English.

Once the picture was taken, I turned to the grandfather and said the only words I know in his language. Masi cho. That means….thank you very much.

The grandfather’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. He heard “thank you” in his own language from this white woman from the United States! These simple words joined us together in gratitude for a very simple gesture…taking a picture together.

Words can have much deeper meaning than we know. The words the disciples spoke on Pentecost were not only words the Jews from around the word could hear as their own language, but ones that touched their hearts as well. They were able to hear about God’s love in a way that was meaningful for them.

The language of love is heard not only in words, but in actions. You may have heard of the Five Love Languages. These are ways that people receive and express love. Think about how you know if someone loves you. Your first thought probably has to do with one of the love languages.

Maybe the most common way to express love is with words of affirmation. In addition to actually saying…I love you…these words include compliments or sending someone a little text to say you are thinking of them. Jesus shared words of affirmation with his disciples as he told them of his love for them.

Quality time is another love language. Being physically present with a loved one, not focused on your phone or the TV, shows many of us that we are loved. Jesus certainly shared quality time with the disciples. They traveled with Jesus everywhere he went and Jesus spent quite a bit of time teaching them in their small group.

Jesus showed his love through physical touch, another of the love languages. He held children on his lap. He touched lepers and others in need of healing. Many times when I ask children how they can show love, they say…a hug.

The fourth is acts of service. This can be the little things you do for a loved one. Maybe it’s doing the dishes after they have cooked a meal or putting gas in their car when you noticed the tank was nearing empty. Jesus fed the 5000 and healed the sick, certainly acts of service.

Gift giving is another way to express love. How many of us have kept some small gift or card someone has given us? It doesn’t have to be an expensive item. It is probably where “it’s the thought that counts” saying comes from.

Jesus was the ultimate gift giver. It was not material possessions that he shared. His gifts always came from his love. Jesus gave his life for all on the cross. There could be no greater gift.

Today on Pentecost we remember the gift Jesus promised to the disciples and to us. Jesus promised to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Through this Spirit, Jesus promised to always be with us.

The first gift of the Spirit to the disciples was the gift of language. It allowed them to speak of God’s love through Jesus to everyone.

This Spirit now lives in us. The Spirit shows us how to love, whether it is through our words or our actions. It is a language that is universal, known by the people of every nation. Through your words and actions, others will see that Spirit alive in you

Consider how your words and actions share the love of God today. On this Pentecost Sunday, may we all show the Spirit alive in us! Amen.