

Sermon for June 8th, 2014

Pentecost Sunday, John 20:19-23

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Imagine this—it is said that there are more than 6,800 different languages being used in our world today. I find that a **most** amazing statistic. When I was at the baggage claim at LAX a few weeks ago I was **also amazed** at just how many languages I heard spoken as I stood **waiting** for my bags to arrive. People were there from all over the world waiting for their bags **much** like me. They were speaking in languages that I could **not** understand but they were **clearly** being understood by the people they were talking to.

Show of hands-----How many of you speak another language?///// I grew up in a family system in which **Swedish** was used quite frequently—especially if my grandfather and his friends did **not** want anyone else to know what they were talking about. I know a **few** words but I cannot say with any authority that I ‘**know**’ Swedish. I have taken quite a few classes in an **attempt** to learn Spanish. I can read and understand it pretty well, but once again I cannot say with any authority that I ‘**know**’ Spanish.

Here we are today celebrating Pentecost Sunday which is the **fiftieth** day after Easter. This day is **also** known in the Jewish world as the *Festival of Weeks*

or *Shavuot* which for them is a prominent feast which celebrates **God** giving the **Law** to **Moses** on Mt. Sinai. This is how their festival originated. When God was about to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he permitted them to celebrate the *Feast of the Passover* the night before they left. He **commanded** them that on every annual recurrence of the season that they were to observe the same feast in commemoration of their **liberation** from bondage and their departure from Egypt. 50 days later as they journeyed through the wilderness they arrived at **Mt. Sinai**. This is where God gave them the Law through Moses, and there God **commanded** them to observe this event annually as well.

Of course, we Christians **do not** celebrate the *Festival of Weeks* in the same way the Jews continue to do today. In our second reading from the Book of Acts that celebration was why there were **so many** devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem there that day **all together** in one place. We celebrate this day because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. We **also** consider this day as the **birth of the ‘C’hurch**.

I would like to point out here that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the **day of Pentecost** was not like many of the other times we have heard about Spirit arriving such as: in the breath of God being given, or the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove, or the Holy Spirit resting upon the people like it says in our **first** reading for today, or Jesus breathing on the disciples and the Holy Spirit being

received. In **Genesis chapter 1** we read, “*the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.*” In **chapter 2** it says, “*then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*” In **Luke chapter 3** we read, “*and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove.*” In our **gospel** reading for today we read that Jesus breathed on the disciples and he said to them, “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” In each of these cases it sounds as though the receiving of the Holy Spirit was a calm and gentle event.

BUT NOT ON PENTECOST!!!! That was **totally** different. That day in Jerusalem where the small band of about **120 believers**, which made up the **earliest** community of Jesus’ faithful, as well as the Jews who were gathered to recall the powerful, gracious, life-giving presence of God something **very unusual** occurred. There were **no** words of calmness and gentleness. The words used were: ‘suddenly’, ‘rush of violent wind’, ‘divided tongues as of fire’, ‘tongues resting on them’, ‘bewildered’, ‘amazed’, ‘astonished’, ‘perplexed’, and ‘what does this mean?’ **It means** the coming of God in a new and glorious way!!! **It means** God’s Spirit is resting upon each of us. **It means** we can all—each and every one of us—hear people speaking about God’s great deeds of power in our **own** languages whatever language that might be—all **6,800** of them.

Of course, there are usually a few in every crowd who are the naysayers. Those who sneer and those who do not believe what they are seeing or hearing. Those who doubt God's **mighty power**. I suppose they are **necessary** for the story as well.

In our reading we heard about how Peter raised his voice, addressed the crowd by quoting from the **Book of Joel**. He said, *“Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only 9:00 in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet, Joel. ‘God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh. The people will prophesy, see visions, dream dreams, there will be signs on the earth.’”* Then here is the good news—**don't miss it**—*‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’*. And here is the next verse from Acts which we **did not** read today, Peter continued, *“Men of Israel, listen to this; Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through Him as you yourselves know.”*

As always, it is about what God is doing in us—in our hearts, among us—as a community of faith, and **through us**—as we are sent out into the mission field. **God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit**, comes to us in many ways. It can be in the quiet whisper of the wind, it can be as calm and serene as a descending dove in baptism, or it can be as sudden, forceful, and violent as a howling tornado. The **truth** is that

the **power** of God's Spirit is **not** restricted by our human will or desire. We cannot **catch it** in our hands, we cannot **contain it**, we cannot **control it**, and we cannot **confine it**. God's Spirit is everywhere. It is in **you** and it is in **me**.

For us, Pentecost is **not only** the celebration of the birth of the 'C'hurch with wind and divided tongues of fire. It is also the celebration of the sure and certain **promise** that wherever the wind blows, wherever chaos and life intersect, the **Spirit** of God is there. Blowing us here and there and guiding us, **God's** people, into the heart of God's mission in the world. As disciples of Jesus **we too** are called and sent out into the world to **minister** to those in need no matter which of the **6,800** languages they speak. Thanks be to God. **AMEN**.