

The Power of Communication

May 31, 2020

Scripture: Acts 2: 1-21

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the Lord's followers were together in one place. ² Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting. ³ Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there. ⁴ The Holy Spirit took control of everyone, and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak.

⁵ Many religious Jews from every country in the world were living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And when they heard this noise, a crowd gathered. But they were surprised, because they were hearing everything in their own languages. ⁷ They were excited and amazed, and said: "Don't all these who are speaking come from Galilee?" ⁸ Then why do we hear them speaking our very own languages?

⁹ Some of us are from Parthia, Media, and Elam. Others are from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya near Cyrene, Rome, ¹¹ Crete, and Arabia. Some of us were born Jews, and others of us have chosen to be Jews. Yet we all hear them using our own languages to tell the wonderful things God has done".

¹² Everyone was excited and confused. Some of them even kept asking each other, "What does all this mean?" ¹³ Others made fun of the Lord's followers and said, "They are drunk."

¹⁴ Peter stood with the eleven apostles and spoke in a loud and clear voice to the crowd: "Friends and everyone else living in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I have to say! ¹⁵ You are wrong to think that these people are drunk. After all, it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ But this is what God had the prophet Joel say, ¹⁷ "When the last days come, I will give my Spirit to everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams.

¹⁸ In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will work miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. There will be blood and fire and clouds of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be as red as blood before the great and wonderful day of the Lord appears. ²¹ Then the Lord will save everyone who asks for his help."



Welcome to Pentecost Sunday! Today we begin a new sermon series called "God's Creative Connection". In

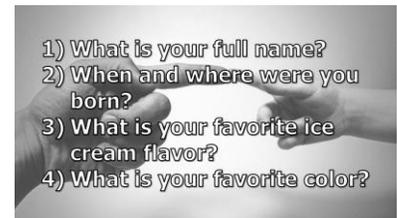
this series we will look at the creative work of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost Sunday and that continues to be at work ever since – even today as we gather together. The Spirit's work began at the dawn of creation and has been present in the work of leading and guiding God's people and in the restoration of the created world, inching us closer and closer to the original "very good" found in the garden. God's vision of a world both connected to God himself and to one another, each created in his image, has resulted in some very creative ways to accomplish God's purposes. We begin today as we look at the arrival of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the first believers. Let us pray...

As we begin this morning, let us first consider the audiences there at the birth of the church. The first group that we meet in our passage are the followers of Jesus. They gather together as they did every day, meeting to pray and to worship the Lord. Their peaceful gathering is disrupted by a *"noise from heaven"* that was like the sound of a *"mighty wind"*. Just as they were imagining what the noise could be, the wind filled the house where they were meeting. It was coming for them. As the house was filled, *"they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there"*. The fire was the Holy Spirit. And please note who the tongues of fire settled upon. It was not just on the eleven disciples. Today we would say that it was not just upon the "pastors". The Holy Spirit fell upon all of the followers of Jesus. My friends, that means the Holy Spirit falls upon you.

The second group that comes to the gathering is *"many religious Jews from every country in the world"*. There was a great representation of the nations of the world that came to the house that the followers were gathered in. There are fifteen nations listed in verses nine through eleven. But this is just a partial list as the passage said, *"some of us"*. We also read that some were born Jews, while some have become Jews. The crowd that gathered represented people from all over the known world and included both "chosen people" and "grafted in people". To me this says that God welcomed everyone to the party. I believe that this is still the preference of God. Last week we heard the call from Jesus in Acts 1 as well as in the mission statements of the United Methodist Church and this local church to tell the good news of Jesus Christ to *"everywhere in the world"*. We definitely find a parallel idea in today's passage.

As the Spirit empowered, the followers begin to tell of the wonderful things that God had done. In verse six we read that the Jews *"were hearing everything in their own languages"* and that they were *"excited and amazed"*. The simple fact that these simple Galileans were speaking in at least fifteen different worldly languages must have been hard to comprehend. What an exciting and creative way for God to begin to communicate the story of Jesus with the world!

Now, to help you understand what it would have been like when the followers began to speak in tongues, please answer aloud these four questions on the screen on the count of three. First, what is your full name? Second, when and where were you born? Third, what is your favorite ice cream flavor? And fourth, what is your favorite color? Even though there is a fairly small number gathered here, it was hard to hear any one voice, wasn't it? And, yet on that day, each person from Egypt heard Egyptian only and each person from Rome heard Roman only and so on. Isn't it amazing what the power of the Holy Spirit can do when God unleashes it to go to work? What a creative way for God to invite the diverse people of the world into the newly forming family of God.



In response to some dubious questioning by the crowd about the followers' sobriety at 9:00 AM, Peter and the other disciples stand to address the crowd. He begins by saying, *"Friends and everyone else living in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I have to say"*. There is an explanation for what has just occurred. And the explanation is held within the Old Testament scriptures.

Beginning in verse seventeen, Peter quotes from the prophet Joel. Joel was a minor prophet who wrote after the period of exile in Babylon. He wrote during a time of dire hardship in Israel. Locusts have ravaged the land and drought is strangling what little life was left behind in the locust's wake. Animals are dying of thirst and starvation as the people of Israel also endure a severe famine. All worship services have been suspended because there is not enough grain or wine to make the daily offerings. God's people wonder if God has forsaken them. As we read Peter quoting Joel, think how powerful these words would have sounded to a people living in a time of such hardship and suffering.

Beginning in verse seventeen, again we read these words: *"When the last days come, I will give my Spirit to everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.*



Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy". This day in Jerusalem the prophecy is being fulfilled. Words written hundreds of years before are coming to fruition. The Spirit that is being poured out will lead God's people – God's servants – to prophesy and to see visions and to dream dreams. In the book of Joel, he writes of when God will intervene in human affairs with a cataclysm so decisive that God's salvation and judgment will come and end the present age. During the disaster a strange thing happens in Israel. Because life is so barren and they are so powerless to stop the locusts or the drought, the people turn to God. With nothing but God to rely upon, the people of Israel begin to experience God more intimately and personally.

Faith is revived and the people begin to actively experience God's deliverance. Does this not sound like what happens to the early church as God unleashes the Holy Spirit? Does it not sound like what happens in people's lives today when the Holy Spirit goes to work redeeming and restoring and bringing wholeness?

Peter and James and John and the rest of the eleven would go forth from Pentecost with a new focus and with divine power. They would boldly preach in Jesus' name, often suffering, but ever joyful. Paul and Timothy and Silas and others would each be filled with the Holy Spirit and they too would set out across the known world, preaching the good news, converting people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, establishing churches as they went. The church was born and grew as faithful followers of Jesus Christ shared the story of what Jesus had done in their lives. Simply through the power of communication, lives were changed. In a multitude of creative ways, through Spirit-fueled words and deeds, the church spread across the known world. One person shared their faith in Jesus Christ with another person or with a group of people. One by one, family by family, the church grew. Through this same Holy Spirit power, the church continues to grow and spread day by day. In the world, there are more Christians today than there ever have been. There are now an estimated 2.1 billion Christians scattered throughout the world. The Bible has been translated into many different languages – just over 700. The church continues to reach across generations and cultures to share the good news of Jesus Christ in new and creative ways. The style of worship that we practice this morning is a great example of this. The recent translation of the Bible that is in



our pews is another great example of “modern” developments that allow the church to connect to new segments and to new generations of the population. And technology has allowed the church to connect to people and places in ways and at times that the church would have never envisioned just a hundred years ago. Faith is available online as well as in sound bites via text, tweet, post, chat, and snap.

On that first Pentecost Sunday, God began to grow a new community of faith through some creative and effective communication. We also know that the Spirit has always been at work in the world, bringing new life. Ever since the beginning of time the Spirit has moving and flowing and speaking and nudging in new and creative ways as God ever seeks to connect to us and to connect us to one another. Over the next few weeks we will explore how God’s creative Spirit worked in the lives of Abraham and his descendants and how it continues to work in the live of believers in the world today. We, as the people of God, have a role to play. Through our voices and actions, may we reveal God’s love and God’s desire to connect to all people everywhere. May our words and actions demonstrate that God is willing to do anything to connect with those who do not yet know Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is the best news ever. May we share it with joy with all that we meet this week. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) Grow. When has God's Holy Spirit worked in an unexpected way in your life? How is this part of the story you have to tell?
- 2) Pray. Where have you felt led to share your faith but been hesitant or otherwise held back? Pray for God's power to help you to share!
- 3) Study. Read Acts 2: 22-42. Is this even possible today in our communities? What would it take to make this happen?