

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

May 19, 2024 (Day of Pentecost, Year B)
Acts 2:1-21

It's Pentecost Sunday: the day when we remember the birth of the church—when God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the apostles.

The disciples were all quietly gathered together, kind of like we are here now. And it says, “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.”

From that moment on, the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the early Church. When you read the Book of Acts, you can't help but see the Spirit at work. The Spirit was present in EVERYTHING the Church did. No speech or action or event took place without FIRST being ordained or directed or encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It was the SOLE SOURCE of GUIDANCE for the Church, and it was the source of COURAGE and POWER for its members. The Spirit gave them the courage to face danger, the strength to cope with life, and JOY – even when times were hard. In the book of Acts, in the first 13 chapters alone, there are more than 40 references to the Holy Spirit: The early Church was a SPIRIT-FILLED Church.

But today's reading isn't just about what DID happen, it's also about what DOES happen. We tend to get caught up in the gifts of the Spirit in this passage – the spectacle of the moment, the oo's and the ah's, the speaking in tongues and prophesying. And there are numerous churches, the Charismatic or Pentecostal churches, that are BASED on these gifts. But let's not miss the point. The REASON the disciples spoke in other languages wasn't FOR THEM; it wasn't so THEY could have a wild spiritual experience. They spoke in OTHER languages for OTHERS – so that people could hear about God in their OWN LANGUAGE, so they could UNDERSTAND it. For the first time in their lives, these people were hearing the Word of God in words that made SENSE to THEM. EACH person heard it in a way they UNDERSTOOD – and it struck home. It went right to their hearts.

You see, we all NEED God's WORD. People need to HEAR the STORY, and Pentecost reminds us that they need to hear it in their OWN LANGUAGE. Now, I know there are people in this congregation who SPEAK 2 or more national languages, but a community doesn't need to be MULTILINGUAL to have different LANGUAGES.

For example, young people have a language of their own. Have you ever listened to a couple TEENAGERS talking? I've listened to MY kids talking, and it's a foreign language. Let me show you what I mean.

(Show video “Gen Z Bible”)

Annabelle says that she understands that video better than the English version she grew up on. She'd laugh at me if I tried to use ANY of those words, but what's important is that SHE CAN, and she DOES.

It's not JUST Gen Z; OLDER folks have a language of THEIR own too.

Women have a different language than men. I listen to my wife and her sister talk, and I can't KEEP UP with their conversation.

THOSE may be obvious, but it's also true that PASTORS have their own language. When pastors get together, we use STRANGE THEOLOGICAL words that sound like INCANTATIONS to MOST people.

MOTHERS have a UNIQUE language too. So do fathers. There are things mothers and fathers say to their children that you won't hear from ANYBODY else.

TEACHERS have a language ALL their own.

VETERANS have their own language. They have experiences and shorthand that nobody else could understand.

TRUCK drivers have a SPECIAL language, that comes in the color BLUE. My father was retired military who BECAME a truck driver, so I know MULTIPLE languages. I keep those tongues to myself though, or I wouldn't be a pastor very long.

FARMERS have a different language than—say—BOOKKEEPERS. NURSES have a different language than FACTORY workers. But they ALL NEED to HEAR the STORY, and they need to hear it in their OWN LANGUAGE.

And the CHURCH needs to TELL the story, in ALL THOSE LANGUAGES. The Church isn't a building; it's people. YOU are the Church, and LIKE those disciples at Pentecost, you SPEAK those languages. Someone here KNOWS Gen Z, and Gen X, and all the other Generations too. Some of you KNOW how to talk to a "mother." Some of you know "farmer" and "bookkeeper." Some of you know "truck driver" and "veteran," and "teacher" and "nurse" and "factory worker," and SO MANY OTHER languages, because you ARE those things. Those are the TONGUES the Holy Spirit has GIVEN you. You know how to speak in words that THEY UNDERSTAND. You know what to SAY.

And don't let anyone ever tell you that you DON'T. It DOESN'T TAKE fancy words. It doesn't take a degree in theology or rhetoric. You KNOW what Jesus MEANS to YOU. You KNOW what God has DONE for you, and that God is working in your LIFE RIGHT NOW. That's what the Spirit is all about.

Like the disciples at Pentecost, the Spirit has given you the ability to speak in a language that SOMEBODY NEEDS to HEAR. You know the WORDS that will strike home; you know how to TOUCH their HEARTS.

This is the day of Pentecost, the birth of the Church, and the Spirit is with YOU now. So GO OUT, and TELL the STORY – in your OWN WORDS. Amen.