

Have you ever thought about how the Holy Spirit communicates in your life – in our communal life as a congregation? Music, relationship, hearing the WORD, experiencing God’s creation. What is the language of the Spirit in your life? Where have you experienced it? When was the last time?

When we link our spiritual history with those who have gone before us, we come to this passage in Acts. It was springtime - the Jewish harvest festival of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover - when the first fruits of wheat were presented to God in thanksgiving for God’s grace and mercy. They called it Shavuot- “The Feast of Weeks” (Ex 34; Dt 16; Num 28; Lev 23). Jews came to celebrate the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In the Pentecost story described in Acts 2, those who gathered for the festival were devout Jews. These Jews were from across the known world, from the diaspora after the destruction of their Temple centuries before, and their exile into parts unknown. Even though they had the same religion, because of this Diaspora, they spoke many different languages.

And then it happened. A loud sound like the rush of a violent wind sweeping through the room in which the frightened disciples are gathered; tongues "as of fire" descending upon their heads. The Holy Spirit filled them all. Jesus had instructed them to wait until the Holy Spirit had come to them, and suddenly here it is. The most amazing things began to happen. They finally got out of that room, bursting through the doors, into the world, speaking and understanding in languages they didn't even know. On that first Pentecost after Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension, the power of the Holy Spirit is given to the followers of the Jesus. It was the birthing of the Christian Church.

All the men and women crowding the streets of Jerusalem for the festival, began to understand every word of the good news the disciples were preaching that day. They hear and are confused. *“How is it that we hear in our own native language? What does this mean?”* Miraculously, the divided tongues bring together those who have been divided, through language, geography, culture, belief.

Of course, not everyone experienced it the same way. Some folks were frightened, and when people are afraid or challenged, they get skeptical. They try to figure things out, find a "logical" explanation for what's happening, so it can be contained, find a good reason to dismiss its significance. So some of them yell out, *“These fellows are drunk.”* But Peter, emboldened by the Spirit, put a paradigm shift on the event – This is the work of God coming among us. Essentially, God was sending this message: Though humans crucify, God resurrects. Though humans divide *and dominate*, *God communicates*. God has the last word. The Holy Spirit changes everything. It rebuilds broken community.

Pentecost reverses the Tower of Babel, in which different languages effectively divided the peoples. These stories, written thousands of years ago, frame the essential predicament of our contemporary, world. Pentecost faith has implications beyond the walls of the church. We live in the age of many languages, cultures, beliefs, values. Different cultures and peoples have been brought into closer contact with one another by our global culture. America is divided into red and blue. Barbed wire & walls separate Jews and Palestinians in the Holy Land. Have you noticed how easily “Enemy” language sneaks into our vocabulary?

What are the "languages" that not only threaten to divide our community, but also inhibits our ability to be relevant in the community. How can we reach across so many differences - in language, culture, religious upbringing, economic class, education, and basic personality types, the generation gap – to communicate what God has done in our lives, how the Holy Spirit has been active. How do we make

the spirit come alive for a new generation, while honoring the contributions and the sacred traditions of those who have gone before us.

Like the disciples, we too, have to burst outside of our walls – both our interior walls, as well as the walls and the doors of this church, to communicate God's story, God's Spirit, God's love.

"What is the Pentecost story that is going on in each of our inner lives that finds expression in our communal lives? Where do you feel the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life, in the life of our congregation? What is the language of the Spirit. The "inside story" of Pentecost is in progress right now in each of our inner lives. Richard Heitzenrader, Wesley scholar from Duke Divinity School in describing grace said this: "*Grace is what God, by the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit, is doing in your inner life.*" The Holy Spirit is found in "sighs too deep for words" that move through creation, giving us life, energy, imagination, and courage to face the challenges of today. Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." We can receive that same life-giving power. Breathe deeply God's Spirit; be transformed and inspired.

Direct your attention toward what God is doing in your inner life; For I truly believe that if we behold the "inside story" of how God has transformed our lives through the Spirit, God will give us the language of reaching others and transforming the story of God's church. I want every person who comes to this church to feel welcome and safe. I want each one of us to feel that we are in Christ's inner circle. I want the fire of God's Spirit to burn within each one of us. That's what I hope for and work for. Linking how God acted in the past with how God was still at work in and through us. The same Spirit of God that warmed the hearts of those disciples on the road to Emmaus and inspired the tongues of those gathered in Jerusalem is looking to inspire a rebirth within us.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will, to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity.

Come, Holy Spirit. Come as mighty wind or gentle breath. Blow on the embers of our faith.

Empower us to speak and to act so that there might come a day when there is not a needy person among us.

May the Spirit's fire be in our thoughts, making them true, good and just. May the Spirit's fire be in our eyes. May the Spirit's fire be on our lips, so that we may speak the truth in kindness. May the Spirit's fire be in our ears that we may hear with a deep, deep listening and be protected from gossip and from other things that harm and break down our family. May the Spirit's fire be in our arms and hands so that we may be of service and build up love. May the Spirit's fire be in our whole being; in our legs and feet, enabling us to walk the earth with respect and care and keep us steadfast on the path toward truth and justice. May it be so. Amen.