

New Language

*The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME*

Sunday, June 9, 2019

Scripture: [Acts 2:1–11](#), [Genesis 11:1–9](#)

Sermon

I love Pentecost, I love the fire imagery... I think, against my better judgment and how I usually roll... I like the danger of fire and flame and the Spirit. I inherently think of Pentecost as a parallel to that first time your parents ever left you at home alone or in charge of your siblings. This is the disciples playing with matches... complete with a weird side story about being drunk at maybe an inappropriate time...

But I don't think I had ever spent much time pondering the fact that the stories of this day, both Babel and Pentecost focus so much on language. Which, quite honestly, is pretty silly considering how everything is about language in them.

If you were here last week, you might remember that we just mentioned that Jesus's great prayer for his disciples (and for us) was "that they may all be one," but it was emphatically **not** "that they may all be the same."

And so it is here. In Babel, the gathered people of humanity were most anxious about all staying the same, that their language and their culture might never change... and so they build up a fortress for themselves to guard against the possibility of change itself. And God steps in... what results feels disorienting, and unfair, and disrupts their plans, their safety, their walls against the other... because though in the story we only here about the one group of residents of Babel in existence... you juts know that there is another chapter coming where they discover *who* they do not want to change them, who they do not want to learn new languages from.

But the story finds connection and deepening here in Acts: we *should* be **one**, we should not be the **same**. It is easy to get Pentecost twisted: it is easy to remember this story as the one where the disciples and people from all over start speaking the same language... **It's not that story**. This is the story of how the Spirit shows up powerfully when disciples listen deeply to understand the myriad languages in their midst.

We do, too, here. Here we have English and Russian, Lingala and German, Swahili and French, here we know ASL... One of the challenges of language is that the difference can seem so much... if you've ever spent a lot of time in a place where you do not speak the language, you know how exhausting that can seem... living in translation. But we are reminded that the difference of Pentecost is different accents for the same deeply held words: the power of God in our lives, our deepest questions, concerns, our joys and revelations... these are much more similar than we might think when we listen deeply to each other.

This weekend, leaders from our congregation went away... so far away... all the way to St. Mary's down the block... but we went away to listen... to tell each other what things we are celebrating in our ministries... what things are challenging us... what we hope to do in the coming year. So mostly, we listened to each other's multiple ways of hearing and seeing the Spirit in our midst.

We need to listen for where the wind blows... the invitation of our community then is never, "Come be like us..." It must always be, "Come bring God's gifts in you and *change us*, and tell the world the story of how you have been changed by this story of Christ's incarnation, ministry, by the very possibility of resurrection and new life, and the movement of the Holy Spirit."

We listen with all our languages so we can better go and tell our heart's story of God...

In the end, when he realizes that everyone can understand everyone else, it is Jesus's disciple, Peter... Peter ashamed and afraid, Peter who hid from trouble, Peter of many questions... but who would always pull Jesus off to the side so he might not risk looking foolish... Peter the called Cephas, which means "rock" who sunk like a stone trying to walk on water... PETER. Peter who understands the gift that is the wondrous multiplicity of language, but in the midst of it *understanding*... who steps out into the center of the scene and begins to preach, to find new words for his own story of Jesus, and the story of Israel, reaching back to the prophets and stretching into the future... assured that Jesus is still with him, and that the guide of the Holy Spirit will direct his words... even unto the end of the age.

There is a language that is just yours for the mystery of the power of God in your life. A language for the questions that only you can put *just so* for where your faith is still wrestling. But that power, those questions... we can understand them... for we have our own languages for the same thing. And somewhere, when we start to understand the unique beauty of each of us, and how that connects all of us... somethings starts to spark, and set all that can be ignited by joy and love to flame.

So new members and old, young people with visions, and elders with dreams... come and speak the language of your heart here... not because it will sound the same, but because it will be different and here in that sweet harmony we may find the music of God.

May we reach for all the language... may we welcome every accent, every nuance, every dialect to hear God's voice in this community, and in the world... that no matter the language, all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Amen.