

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. ⁴They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently.

⁵Now there were godly Jewish men from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷They were completely baffled and said to each other, “Look, are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them speaking in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, and of Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.” ¹²They were all amazed and perplexed. They kept saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others mocked them and said, “They are full of new wine.”

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and spoke loudly and clearly to them: “Men of Judea, and all you residents of Jerusalem, understand this, and listen closely to my words. ¹⁵These men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶On the contrary, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷This is what God says will happen in the last days:

I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.

Your sons and your daughters will prophesy.

Your young men will see visions.

Your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in the sky above,
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and a rising cloud of smoke.

²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹And this will happen: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Message Received

I.

It makes a distinctive sound, a mass of humanity gathered together for a festival. From blocks away you can hear a dull roar. From a distance, no words can be picked out; it just seems like noise. Still, you know that the noise comes from many voices. Each person in attendance is speaking with others nearby.

The closer you get, the more voices you can distinguish. Peals of laughter greet your ears; it seems someone in a group told a joke; though you couldn't hear the joke itself, you can tell that's what was going on. Groups of children are playing, and all the noises that go on with their activity.

Today's First Reading spoke about the Tower of Babel, where God dispersed the crowd by confusing their language. The name “Babel” sounds like the Hebrew word for confusion. Ever since, whenever a large crowd gathers for a festival in a cosmopolitan city like Jerusalem, there will be people from diverse locations. Individuals will naturally be attracted to others they can understand and gather together in groups. It is natural for people to want to clearly understand

one another.

God is a God who wants to communicate. He is a God who wants to be clearly understood. He actually speaks quite plainly to us. After the Great Flood, God had told Noah and his descendants to spread out and fill the earth. Not long after the flood was over, many of them clustered together in defiance of God's command and decided to build their great tower. In messing up *their* communications by giving them many different languages rather than one common language, God reinforced his communication to them that they were to disburse.

II.

"When the day of Pentecost came..." (Acts 2:1, EHV). Contrary to popular belief by Christians today, Pentecost was not some new festival that only came about on this special day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was a festival dating back all the way to the time of Moses. This festival was the time the Jews celebrated and gave thanks to God for the harvest of new grain. It was one of the three major festivals in Jewish religious life. On these major festivals, people of Jewish decent made their way to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Many came from all over the Mediterranean world, where they had adopted the languages of the places they lived.

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1, EHV). The followers of Jesus were all there in Jerusalem for this festival, too. The Eleven remaining from the close disciples were certainly in this group. The group was probably larger. The previous chapter of Acts tells us: "In those days...the group there numbered about 120 people" (Acts 1:15, EHV).

That whole group was gathered together in one place. It isn't hard to imagine that they might have been gathered together for a worship service. Quite likely they were having a communion service, following Jesus' directions to do this often in remembrance of him. That certainly would be a good reason for all of them to be gathered together.

"Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them" (Acts 2:2-3, EHV).

There was a new noise added to the festival atmosphere of Jerusalem—the sound like the rushing of a violent wind. There *wasn't* a violent wind, but it *sounded* like one. *That* got the attention of the crowds nearby. Abandoning their prior conversations and play, they set off to see what was going on.

There were divided tongues that were *like* fire resting on the believers. There wasn't fire, but there were things that *looked like* fire on their heads.

"Now there were godly Jewish men from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶... a crowd came together" (Acts 2:5-6, EHV). Remember, God is a God who wants to communicate to us. The sound of a rushing, violent wind and the sight of something that looked like tongues of fire were attention-getters. They served to bring together a large crowd of people for what was about to happen.

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently" (Acts 2:4, EHV). I doubt whether anyone would have thought these followers of Jesus were such language scholars that they could speak fluently in several different languages. This was clearly a miracle of communication.

"When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷They were completely baffled and said to each other, 'Look, are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them speaking in his own native language?'" (Acts 2:6-8, EHV).

The crowd was from all over the region. Though most of them were of Jewish decent, some were proselytes—that is, converts to Judaism. All of them were hearing the followers of Jesus speak in the languages native to where they lived.

III.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the

message comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17, EHV). Believers do not exist apart from learning about God’s message of salvation. If people are not told about Christ Jesus and what he has done for them, they cannot believe it. The Church is the people of God, and the Church never exists apart from the marks of the Church—that is, God’s Word and Sacraments. Without the message that Christ died on the cross for your sins, the Church does not exist.

The people around Jerusalem for the festival declared: “We hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11, EHV). The sound of the rushing wind and the tongues that looked like fire were the attention-getters to make sure the real miracle was noticed. It was important that the message of God would be spoken to these people in languages they could clearly understand.

“They were all amazed and perplexed. They kept saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:12, EHV). Apparently they were good Lutherans. More likely, Luther just borrowed their question to use for every part of Christian doctrine. It is important to ask: “What does this mean?” and dig in deeper; to learn more.

“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and spoke loudly and clearly to them: ¹⁶ “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ This is what God says will happen in the last days: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” (Acts 2:14, 16-17, EHV). Peter starts with the Old Testament and applies the prophecy of Joel to what Jesus had done.

It is essential for people to know what Jesus has done. Jesus did not just die on the cross for people of Jewish descent, not even just for those who were proselytes who had converted to Judaism. Jesus died for the sins of *all* people. *Everyone* needs this message. God wants that message clearly communicated. That’s why Peter and the others were given a special ability that day—to speak fluently in languages they had never learned. These crowds of people gathered in Jerusalem for a festival would disperse to their homelands; they would take with them the message communicated so clearly to them in languages they completely understood.

IV.

Much of the sermon Peter preached is recorded after today’s Second Reading. You can read more of it for yourself. What stands out in Peter’s sermon is that he proclaimed both law and gospel to the crowds.

They heard the message that they were sinners who need a Savior. They heard the message that *their* sins were responsible for Jesus’ death on the cross.

The preaching of the law prepared their hearts for the gospel. Peter announced to them forgiveness for these sins. That’s what Jesus came to do—provide the payment for our sins that we could never hope to achieve on our own.

The same message of law and gospel is essential today. *You* have sinned. The little things you do which you *know* are wrong are not little in the eyes of God. *You* need the forgiveness Jesus won. That message is needed by each one of us every day, not just on the days we gather together for worship. It’s a message that is still needed by billions of people alive today. Perhaps you haven’t been trained to speak God’s Word to others. “Look, are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” (Acts 2:7, EHV). Peter and the others, while they were companions of Jesus for three years, were not graduates of some seminary. They were not intellectual giants. But they *did* have the one thing needed—they *did* have the message about Jesus that is essential to faith.

So do you. You also have the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:18, EHV). Prophecy, in the Old Testament, often *did* mean telling about future events, but to prophesy simply means to speak God’s Word to people. Peter declared that the prophecy of Joel that this ability would be universal had come to pass that Pentecost Day.

You have it, too. Message Received. God’s Word clearly communicates to us what God has done for us—that he has given us a Savior who bought for us the forgiveness of our sins. Pass it on. Amen.