

Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:25-35, 37b  
Romans 8:14-17  
John 14:8-17, 25-27

Pentecost C  
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island  
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### Another Mother Tongue

Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire. Enlighten us with your celestial fire. For if you are with us then nothing else matters. And if you are not with us then nothing else matters. Be with us, we pray in the name of your Beloved. Amen<sup>1</sup>

I was once in a Bible study that got around to talking about the Trinity. So I asked the question Who's your favorite? I was met with puzzled looks. You know, which person of the Trinity do you spend the most time with? Which person do you pray to? Which person do you think of when you think of God? We all know that the Trinity is one God in three persons. And some people said that they engaged the Trinity. But most people, once they thought a moment, had a deeper connection with either God the Father, the creator or God the Son, Jesus or God the Holy Spirit – who was much harder to define. The people who picked the Holy Spirit described the sense of God within, the feeling of God being the guiding force of their lives. They talked about the calming influence of a gentle God. They talked about comfort, which is one of the names for the Spirit – the Comforter.

But the Spirit who blew into town on that day of Pentecost we read about today was anything but calm and comforting. The Spirit that blew in on a mighty wind shook things up more than we can possibly imagine. And the tongues that rested just above their heads, tongues that looked like fire, well, those weren't very comforting! But along with the chaos of wind and fire and a cacophony of voices, there actually was comfort for each and every person. And the comfort was that immigrants who had come from everywhere to live in the great city of Jerusalem heard the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, not in the language of the Roman Empire, but in their own mother tongue, the language of their hearts, the language they thought they'd been required to leave behind. It must have been amazing.

It was only the Galileans who spoke that day, and Galileans weren't the best educated people around so everybody was stunned by their sudden linguistic acumen! They weren't "speaking in tongues," they were speaking in each other's real languages, something they had never done before. They didn't understand it, and they didn't try to explain it. They allowed themselves to be swept away by God's promised Holy Spirit and when they did, the people came from everywhere to listen. People from all throughout Jerusalem made their way to that house that day and all because the Word of God was being spoken in a way they could hear and understand, and because that is so, the world changed forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor opens many of her sermons with this prayer.

Have you ever been swept away by the Holy Spirit? We're Episcopalians, so obviously I don't mean hopping up out of your pew - God Forbid – and dancing your socks off... though I will say that witnessing that sort of possession by the Holy Spirit is one of the most amazing things I will ever encounter. Still, the question is real. Have you ever been swept up by the Holy Spirit? I'll bet you have. Have you ever heard yourself say "I don't know what came over me!"? or "I don't know where that came from!"? Is it possible that those were moments when the Spirit blew through you? I know for a fact that some of you have been swept up by the Holy Spirit because of things you've said to me at the door as you're leaving church. You say things like "I so loved what you said about \_\_\_\_\_" whatever it was you heard, when what you heard isn't anything I said at all. What you heard wasn't me, it was God speaking to you in your own mother tongue. That's how God speaks to us - in our own mother tongue, whispering words we need to hear, spurring us on to do things we need to do. I remember very early on in my priesthood, realizing that I was praying and listening at the same time, that I was praying and talking at the same time and somehow recognizing – not understanding – but recognizing that it wasn't "me" doing that at all. It was the Spirit whispering the words I needed so I could offer them to you.

It was no surprise that the Holy Spirit came upon those people on the day of Shavuot, the day the Jews had long called Pentecost. Shavuot is a very important Jewish festival that commemorates both the Spring harvest and the covenant God made with God's people when the Torah was given. It happens 50 days after the first Seder of Passover and because of 50 days, came to be called Pentecost. The Jewish Pentecost celebrates the Israelites entering into covenant with God, the time when they became a new people, God's people. And when the Holy Spirit came into Jesus' followers on the day of Pentecost we read of today, they became a new people, and a new church came into being. And what a church it was.

It was a church built on a new law, the law of love. Jesus came that we might know that God is love and when Jesus left, he asked the Father to send another Advocate, the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of love, the Spirit of teaching, the Spirit of reminding, the Spirit that is the abiding presence of God who is here and now and everywhere. This Spirit speaks to each of us in our mother tongue, because our native language is the language of love.

All throughout Jesus' farewell discourse, that long goodbye we've been listening to for weeks now, he talks about what will happen when he leaves and the Spirit comes. Nobody really knew what he meant and they didn't know why he kept talking about a Spirit that would come when he went away. They knew it was meant to be comforting, but it wasn't what they wanted to hear when their world was falling apart and they were trying to figure out how to carry on. When Jesus said another Advocate would come, what he meant was that it would be different, and the same as when he'd been with them. Just as Jesus had been with them, as guide and helper and teacher and intercessor and advocate, now the Holy Spirit would be with them, and with us, in the same way.

I was talking with someone after the funeral of a long-time Bainbridge Islander yesterday, the woman who cared for the gardens of the one who had died. She spoke to me of the profound

difficultly of running her company right now and of that difficulty being shared by so many. Our country is no longer welcoming to the stranger and the strangers are not fools. The people who have gardened and cleaned and cared for us in so many ways are leaving the US because the US is no longer safe for them. These people are crystal clear about the reality that they are no longer welcome. So they are disappearing. Housecleaners, yard workers, wait staff, farmworkers, caregivers and so many more are disappearing. Only certain people are guaranteed safety in our country. I am one of those people. Most all of you are those people too. But there are so many people who have lived among us who aren't those people and because that is so, they are leaving us. It's exactly the opposite of what happened that Pentecost day two thousand years ago, the day when every immigrant heard the good news of Jesus Christ in her own language. The people of God didn't have to speak and understand the language of the Empire. God's Holy Spirit spoke to them in the language of their hearts. And while what was spoken mattered deeply, what is so stunning to me is that the words were spoken in a way that everyone could understand them. What was said mattered. The fact that what was said was spoken in every single person's mother tongue, mattered more.

The God of love spoke to each person on that long-ago Pentecost day in the language she or he could understand. And I am quite certain that language was the language of love. Yes, there were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judeans, Cappadocians, and people from Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene. And each one of them heard the Word of God in their own native language. I can't help but think that the root of all those languages was the language of love. The very fact that all those people came because they wanted to hear the Gospel, and that every single one of them was able to hear and understand the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ... well, if that isn't the act of a loving God, then I don't know what is. God's Holy Spirit comes to each and every one of us in the language we can understand, because the language God speaks is the language of love.

God's Holy Spirit comes among us not only to remind us and teach us, but also to make Jesus present to us and in us, here and now. God's Holy Spirit means that incarnation is permanent, filling us with the God who speaks in everyone's language because God's is the language of love. That same Spirit that enlivened Jesus, that united him with God and poured God's love into the world, has come to live in us too.

How has God come to live in you and pour out God's love through you? Who are you being called to speak God's language of love to? Is it your estranged spouse? A friend who is no longer a friend? A sibling you've been unable to speak the truth to? A parent who is broken and demanding far too much of you? The man who mows your lawn, or used to? Pentecost is here! It is the time of speaking the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone, and especially the ones who are not like us. And the Good News the Spirit will speak through us is the news of great joy and great love that is meant for each and every one of us. Come Holy Spirit, come. Amen