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 Bethany Presbyterian Church
 Acts 2:1-21
 May 24, 2026 (Pentecost)

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Our disciples and early followers of Jesus have had Jesus around them for about three years, they have witnessed his death, were astonished at his return, and after Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" he ascended to heaven. Because of all of those things, the disciples have many resources for the work ahead of them. Some call the coming of the Holy Spirit, this celebration of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. But for the disciples it was more like graduation day. Imagine the images in their year book – Jesus saying "follow me" there at the shore that day; that time they were with Jesus when he made a man born blind recover his sight; the time that Samaritan woman actually spoke to Jesus at the well; the friendship they developed with Mary and Lazarus; that confusing entrance into Jerusalem and the horrible crucifixion they witnessed; the experience of the open tomb and return of Jesus that everyone is still talking about; and of course that beautiful time when Jesus opened their

minds to understand all of scripture, right before he ascended and left them. What memories. What a graduation. What a sending. Instead of caps and gowns they were given tongues of fire. Instead of the sounds of Pomp and Circumstance, they were sent a loud violent wind, and with it the ability to speak and understand other languages. Like many new graduates armed with such a collection of experiences and teachings and new understandings, the coming new life begins with bewilderment and some fear. Commentator Matthew Skinner says that verse 12, "All were amazed and perplexed, saying to each other, 'What does this mean?'" refers to "more than being dumbstruck or confused. It's more like the wonder of being pulled into attentiveness, listening, and knowing in a new way. That's what makes it holy work."³

All the languages that were being spoken and understood were real languages of the day, not unintelligible speech as described in other texts. The crowd was culturally diverse. Understanding a new language is not just a matter of exchanging one word for another. Debie Thomas writes, "Languages carry the full weight of their respective cultures, histories, psychologies, and spiritualities. To speak one language as opposed to another is to orient oneself differently in the world — to see differently, hear differently, process and punctuate reality differently. To speak across barriers of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, or politics is to challenge stereotype and risk ridicule. To attempt one language as opposed to another is to make oneself a learner, a servant, a supplicant. It is a brave and disorienting act."⁴

Our lectionary text ends at the beginning of Peter's speech explaining the happening as a fulfillment of the words of Joel. To be noted is that the spirit will be poured out on ALL flesh. Young men, old men, sons and daughters, and slaves. There is no one left out. If we were to read further to the end of Peter's speech we would see that the emphasis is not on recreating the special event and having as many mountain top experiences as we can. Rather we are "encouraged to look for further signs of the Spirit at work." This first Pentecost experience is not something we look to repeat, but the *effects* of the first Pentecost are to enable us to participate in the larger work of God, in the past, present and future. By the end of chapter 2, about three thousand were added to their number. The first converts were not swayed by the tongues of fire and loud wind and new language skills. Later in this same chapter we are told how the new converts spent their time. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."

Look at all that was possible after folks could understand one another. Community was built, divisions were united, clarity was found, hospitality was experienced. What if other divisions could be brought together? The holy spirit gave those early apostles the ability to communicate across a wide range of differences. How might those of us who speak the same language benefit from this lesson of the holy spirit?

What if we were granted the ability to understand other kinds of language even though we speak the same mother tongue?

Beyond language of the alphabet, words themselves, there is the language of attitude, meaning, intention, mood. Do we speak *these* languages? You've heard people speak of their "love language." Do you speak the same love language as your partner or family? For some, acts of service is a love language. For others, their love language is affection. For others, their love language is humor, or guidance, or respect, or presence. These are the indicators that tell others, or actions that we look for in others, that communicate our shared love. The ability to speak the same language inside the language, matters.

What else might benefit from speaking the same language? Think of the last misunderstanding you were a part of. Even when we speak from the same dictionary, we make mistakes. Maybe two people were speaking different languages of another type. The language of fear, loss or grief. The language of pain or panic. The language of crisis. The language of silence. The language of suspicion. The language of insecurity or distrust. Then there are the differences between generations, not to mention text-speak and slang.

Imagine the new depths of understanding that would be possible if we were able to express ourselves more clearly, and understood the language of another more deeply. We would do what the apostles did and engage in community building, spend time with one another, build bridges, expand boundaries, create hospitality. We would spend our time "praising God and having the good will of the people." (Acts 2:47)

Let us pray...

Amen.

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1. Working preacher, commentary on Acts 2:1-21, Rebecca Dean <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/day-of-pentecost/commentary-on-acts-21-21-19>
 2. Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3, pp. 14-19
 3. Working Preacher, Sermon brainwave, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/1085-day-of-pentecost-may-24-2026>
 4. Debie Thomas, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2650-i-will-pour-out-my-spirit>

(#280, Come O Spirit, Dwell Among Us)