

## Day of Pentecost

Acts 2: 1-21

May 15, 2016

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[click here to read scripture passages for the day](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

In the Pentecost story in the book of Acts we see that **the Holy Spirit speaks everyone's language**. The Spirit doesn't only speak one language, the language of the majority, or the language of the powerful - **the Holy Spirit speaks everyone's language**.

The people gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost weren't expecting to hear their own native languages that day. They were in Roman occupied Jerusalem after all and, you know, when in Rome do as the Romans do, right? They were expecting to have to communicate in the language of Roman power, Latin or Greek, or in the language of most of the people in Jerusalem, Aramaic. They, like many people in our country and our world today, didn't expect their languages to be used or respected.

So many people today have reason to expect that their languages and cultures won't be respected and will be viewed as inferior or threatening, or both, somehow.

- Lately people have been kicked off airplanes simply for speaking Arabic.
- Last week an Italian economics professor from the University of Pennsylvania was removed from an airplane because the math equations he was doing looked Arabic to the woman sitting next to him.
- The rhetoric of politicians in the US and Europe is fanning the flames of racism, Islamophobia and tribalism.
- All the uncertainty and change in our world can make us unsettled and suspicious of those who sound different.

Fear and anxiety have such a powerful hold on so many of us today; this fear can lead us to hate "the other", whoever we deem the other to be. Fear and hatred are strong in this broken world. **But the Spirit of God is stronger and more powerful**. And, as Acts says, the Spirit of God has been poured out on all flesh. The Spirit of God speaks in the languages of all people on earth. The Spirit helps us to communicate with one another; helps us call on God's name to save us from fear, hatred and death; and helps us speak God's language of love and reconciliation.

**The Holy Spirit speaks your language to set you free from fear for love of God and neighbor.**

The Spirit speaks now in less dramatic fashion than on that day in Jerusalem, but the Spirit still speaks. The Spirit speaks through creation, other people, the still small voice within, scripture, worship and prayer. The Spirit works like a mighty wind. So when we're blown away by a powerful experience, it might be the Spirit speaking. The Spirit is close to us with each breath we take. So when we're reminded to take a deep breath and just rest a moment, it might be the Spirit speaking.

That Pentecost in Jerusalem the Spirit spoke of God's deeds of power. The Spirit still helps us to know that God's powerful love has overcome fear and hatred through Jesus' death and resurrection, that God has saved

us from fear and death. The Spirit reminds us of Jesus' words - "peace be with you, do not let your hearts be troubled, do not be afraid." The Spirit gives us a new spirit not of fear but of adoption, confidence and joy. So the next time a news story causes you some anxiety, take a few breaths to let go of that spirit of fear and breathe in the Spirit of God. The next time you are tempted to view anyone as the enemy, take a few breaths to let go of the spirit of fear and breathe in the Spirit of God.

### **The Holy Spirit speaks your language and gives you what you need to not be afraid.**

The Holy Spirit speaks in everyone's language. The Spirit speaks in the languages of people that politicians say are scary, in the native languages of people here today - Spanish, Arabic, English, Hmong, Mandarin, German, Pashto, Russian, Persian, Cherokee, Portuguese - and every other language of the world. The Holy Spirit doesn't seek uniformity but rather delights in all the languages and people of the earth. The next time you're at Walmart or in Postville or in a big city and see and hear such diversity, pause and think about the multilingual Spirit - and give thanks. The Holy Spirit speaks in every language.

But too many people don't know that. They've gotten the message that God uses the language of worldly power and domination. So God works in us to let others know that the Spirit speaks their language, that the Spirit understands them and is present with them, that the Spirit speaks to their lives and fears and hopes. God works in us to help others hear about God's deeds of power - how God's love saves us from fear and death. The Holy Spirit also helps us to speak God's language of love and reconciliation to give voice to God's alternate reality in this world full of fear and hatred. The Spirit helps us to speak of God's dream for our world, God's dream that all people would come together in all our diversity to live in love for God and love for one another. The Spirit calls us all to dream this dream and to tell about it, to be God's prophets. Prophets are those who tell of what God is up to in the world, who speak of God's dream in a world of sin and brokenness.

God tells us, in the books of Joel and Acts, "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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." The Spirit of God has been poured out upon us. We have what we need to speak God's language, to speak of God's dream. We have what we need to speak words of love and reconciliation in the midst of this election cycle and in our families, homes, schools, places of work and public spaces.

We have what we need yet still it is so daunting to speak and live God's dream. That is why we ***all*** need the guidance of the practices that Natalie and Anthony commit to today as they affirm their baptisms. Together we need:

- to live among God's faithful people,
- to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
- and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

These core practices are essential in helping us to learn and to speak and to live God's dream for the world. We also need prayer. Today in the Affirmation of Baptism service, we'll pray for God to stir up the Holy Spirit within Anthony and Natalie - the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in God's presence, both now and forever.

Today may that same Spirit be stirred up in each of us. May we know that the Spirit speaks our language and all languages. May we open ourselves to the Spirit speaking through us and helping us to speak God's language.

Let's take a few moments to pray for that now.

A reception honoring the confirmands will follow the service.