

DAY OF PENTECOST

JUNE 5, 2022

Acts 2:1-21 OR Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17 OR Acts 2:1-21; John 14:8-17 [25-27]

[Prayer of the Day: God our creator, the resurrection of your Son offers life to all the peoples of earth. By your Holy Spirit, kindle in us the fire of your love, empowering our lives for service and our tongues for praise, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN

OR

Emily's rewording:

Creator God, Christ's resurrection is the promise of life to your whole creation. Breathe in us your Holy Spirit: kindle the fire of your love; empower our bodies for healing work; inspire our tongues to speak truth and justice; embolden our communities to celebrate diversity; through Jesus the Christ, our Healer and Wholeness, who lives as One with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. AMEN

Thoughts on Acts 2:1-21

Not too many years ago, a relative of mine complained about a small group of new Asian-American immigrants whom she heard in the lunchroom always talking 'their language'. This annoyed her: Why couldn't they speak English? How were their [white] co-workers supposed to know what they were saying?

Sadly, the work place is not the only arena in which people new to America - or simply, people who identify as anything different or 'other' than the white, middle-class, cis-gendered, heterosexual 'norm' that makes up the dominant culture in the US - feel left out, alienated, or even demonized.¹

In many of our congregations the emoji, #- and @-sign language of our young people and the social media world is considered just as 'foreign' and 'unintelligible' - and its dismissal or rejection is experienced in much the same way: why can't the younger generations learn 'our language' and become more like 'us' so we can understand what they are saying?

At a recent synod assembly the request to include pronouns in registration, in order to share them on name tags, was questioned by at least two participants who thought it was 'silly' and simply didn't understand why pronoun awareness was necessary.²

¹ Please listen to Angela Davis' [How Evangelical Christians in Minnesota Are Responding to Calls for Racial Justice](#) [Minnesota Public Radio; 05.20.21].

² For those unfamiliar with the practice and its importance, see [What Are Personal Pronouns and Why Do They Matter?](#) (mypronouns.org; accessed 05.21.22)

May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. June is PRIDE month. Young people are experiencing loneliness at epidemic levels³ while AAPI and anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes soar across this country⁴. The Pentecost story gives us an antidote for hate and division: sharing the story of Divine Love with one another in the languages of our own hearts.

Jesus' final command to the disciples - repeated three times according to the Gospel of John (13:34; 15:12; 15:17) - was to love one another as Jesus had loved them. Our Maundy Thursday celebrations of this commandment recognize Jesus' love as a servant love; a humble love; a love lived out in gracious welcome and hospitality, as we stoop to pour water over one another's feet, reenacting both the humble act of footwashing and pre-figuring the Easter Vigil celebration of Holy Baptism where we welcome new souls into Christ's family. Water is central to living into Jesus' final command to love one another through servant welcome and hospitality.⁵

Before departing this earth Jesus gave the Great Commission - calling his followers to make new disciples in every nation. The tragic history of war, threat of violence, and colonization to forcibly convert 'others' - making 'them' like 'us' - has been antithetical to Pentecost's multilingual outreach of Love.

This Pentecost Sunday, let's wonder: what if the Great Commission was an extension of the Command to Love - make disciples so there can be more Love in the world? What if washing the 'other' with the waters of welcome and hospitality was always only meant to be a first step to help 'us' - who have already experienced Divine Love - see the 'other' as the very family, sibling, fellow disciple we are called to love?

This might help explain why the command to love and the commission to make disciples were followed up with the first, most celebrated - and perhaps most under-appreciated - gift of the Holy Spirit: the gift of languages.

Let's repeat that: the final command was "love"; the first gift was "languages".

Divine Love discloses this incredible gift via a rush of wind and tongues of flame, making Pentecost a celebration of both diversity and unity. That is, all the essential elements are present and utilized for one great purpose: the rushing wind that enlivens all with the Breath of Life; the tongues of flame which amplify and celebrate diversity; the water of welcome and hospitality; the humus of humanity who is called to build belonging (i.e., community) in and through and amongst this diversity.

³ See Sprintide Research for statistics and research-based approaches to addressing loneliness among young people. (<https://www.springtideresearch.org/research/belonging>)

⁴ See [Stop AAPI Hate](#) for latest reports and interventions; see [Hate Crimes Are Rising as Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation Passes and Misinformation Thrives](#), by Alexandra Martinez; Prism; April 20, 2022: <https://prismreports.org/2022/04/20/hate-crimes-rise-anti-lgbtq-legislation/> (accessed 05.21.22).

⁵ For a great treatise on foot washing, see Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rahway, NJ's, [Footwashing in the Old and New Testament, the Graeco Roman World, the Early Church, and the Liturgy](#) by Carmine Pernini.

Humans need to belong and to be claimed; to have a safe harbor, a sheltered place where they are seen, heard, acknowledged, welcome.⁶

Pentecost is Divine Love's kick-start to meeting this need for both humanity and creation. The incorporation of the four elements highlights humanity's interconnectedness with the entire cosmos (earth, air, fire, and water) and one another ('go to all nations'; 'love as I have loved you').

What might those new Americans have felt in my relative's lunchroom if someone had learned to say, 'Hello' or 'Welcome' in 'their language'? How might we employ the media familiar to our young people to help them find a place where they belong? What practices in naming might we engage to let our LGBTQ+ siblings know they are loved for who they are? What attitudes toward creation can we develop to embrace nature as part of our community? What if - in all of these instances - learning a bit of 'their language' became an excuse to interact? What if more of us spoke more languages of love so that the lunchroom, the parade, the church, the earth, became places of welcome and hospitality, of belonging?

Thriving congregations are finding innovative ways to reach out to neighbors from diverse backgrounds - and honor creation - to create communities of love that are wildly eclectic - just like the cacophonous street scene of Pentecost. These are exciting congregations to witness. For a few tips on building community by celebrating diversity this Pentecost (and any time) see the following Great Ideas:

GREAT IDEAS

[Intergenerational Diversity Exploration](#)

[Breadfest](#)

[Celebrate Diversity - Pentecost Style](#)

[Pandemic Pentecost Affirmations](#)

[Pentecost Prayer Stations](#)

How might all of our congregations become a safe harbor for neighbors who are new, lonely, and/or marginalized? How might we build up spaces where people from diverse nations, age-groups, racial and cultural backgrounds, sexual and gender identities, socio-economic standings, etc., find safe harbor, belonging, welcome, hospitality, even love? What gestures might we offer - in languages that others can not only understand, but which help the 'other' feel that they belong, that they are loved?

Pentecost is a celebration of diversity and community. As 'we' lean into both, Divine Love flows and grows.

Blessed be.

⁶ Watch Amelia Franck Meyer's [The Human Need for Belonging](#) TED Talk of October 24, 2016. Everything she says about children continues to be true throughout our lives.



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As an ordained pastor in the ELCA, Emily interned in Seaside, OR, served as pastor, liturgical artist, and faith formation leader in suburban, ex-urban and rural Minnesota congregations, created and directed the multi-congregational affirmation of baptism program, Confirmation Reformation, and was pastor of the retreat center, [Holden Village](#). Rev. Meyer leads contemplative and creative retreats and small groups. Between pastoral gigs, she has enjoyed costume designing, choreographing and performing. She lives in Minneapolis, MN, with spouse Brian and two Wirehaired Pointing Griffons, Kiko and Zip.