

THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from
Region 6



Pentecost, Year A

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Gospel Text – Acts 2:1-21

Acts 2:1-21

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] 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.' "

SERMON TEXT:

Have you ever had the slightly embarrassing experience of receiving a gift, opening it, and realizing you have no clue what it is—let alone what you're supposed to do with it? There you are at a wedding shower, or even more confusing, a baby shower. Someone hands you a beautifully wrapped gift—because the confusing ones always are. You tear off the bow, unwrap the paper, and open the box. The gift giver is eagerly watching; they obviously want you to love it, and you're sure that you would—if only someone would tell you what it is. You try to remember: is this a Bumbo, a Boppy, a BabyBjörn? Is this particular homemade cloth for burping, swaddling, or dealing with something less pleasant? Is this dish decorative, or are you supposed to put something in it?

Sometimes it takes a while to figure out a gift.

I remember a Christmas gift exchange when my husband, Jarrod, ended up with a salsa dish. His aunt had bought it as an "S" gift. We were in college, and he didn't even have an apartment, so it felt completely useless. He looked longingly at the people who got games or snacks. Noticing his disappointment, his aunt handed him the gift receipt, and he went straight from the family gathering to the store to return it, saying, "Who needs a salsa dish?"

The funny thing is that just a year later, we began hosting weekly taco nights in seminary. Every Saturday, as we struggled to dip chips into a salsa jar, I would turn and say, "You know what we need? A salsa dish!" Some gifts just need a bit of time before their true value is discovered.

Pentecost can feel a bit like this: we know we have been given an amazing gift from God—but what exactly is it again, and what is it for? Sure, it's beautifully wrapped in tongues of fire and a multitude of languages, but what exactly are we supposed to do with it beyond dressing in red on Pentecost Sunday?

Each year, we hear the bewildering story from the book of Acts. After Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, his followers gather together and wait for the gift Jesus promised would come. This gift, they are told, will give them the power to faithfully witness to Jesus all over the world—beginning in Jerusalem, then moving out into Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

So, they wait, and wait, and wait...

As the festival of Pentecost approaches, thousands of Jewish pilgrims begin arriving in Jerusalem from across the known world. From the northeast come Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia. From the northwest come those from Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia. From the southwest and west come Egyptians and those from Libya,

Cyrene, Rome, and Crete. And from the southeast come the devout from Arabia. In this moment, Jerusalem becomes a living picture of the world—diverse in language, culture, and experience.

And it is in the midst of this beautifully diverse gathering that the spark of the Holy Spirit ignites—not for show, but so the disciples will have something to say.

Suddenly, the house where they are gathered is filled with the sound of a rushing wind and with fire. The fire splinters into tongues of flame resting over their heads, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, they have something to say. The Spirit enables them to speak, and the message of God’s saving power flows out through them in a multitude of languages—reaching every corner of that gathered community—so that everyone can hear.

It is worth noting that this is not the only way this could have unfolded. God could have united all people under a single common language. That might have been less complicated, less messy. But, God seems to delight in the diversity of this gathering. The Holy Spirit does not erase difference; it works through it—meeting people where they are, allowing the message to arrive in their ears in their own language.

As Eric Barreto puts it, "At Pentecost, God makes a clear choice. God joins us in the midst of the messiness and the difficulties of speaking different languages, eating different foods, and living in different cultures. That is good news indeed."

It is, in many ways, God's boldest yes to diversity.

I remember years ago being gathered in a small sanctuary in Wittenberg for a women's retreat. It drew together leaders from all over Europe and the United States—Germany, Poland, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Latvia, Estonia, and Russia. Each evening, we lifted up the Lord's Prayer in a multitude of languages. It was messy, but beautiful. We didn't need to speak the same words to worship the same God.

Voices layered over one another, not in perfect unison, but in a kind of holy harmony. Different rhythms, different sounds, different ways of speaking—and yet, somehow, one prayer. Not because our language was the same, but because the Spirit met us where we were with the good news of God's love and knit our prayers together.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit sends the followers of Jesus—and us—to speak a message of life and hope in ways that stretch us across cultures, comfort zones, and familiar language. It is relational work. That is the gift we are given at Pentecost—something to say that others can hear.

Now at this point some of us might be wondering: did someone save the gift receipt? Can we give this gift back? Because bearing witness to God's saving power, can feel like a lot of responsibility. In fact, it can feel downright overwhelming.

In American culture especially, we tend to assume that faith is a private affair—something personal, internal, contained. Something between “me and God,” safely managed and politely kept out of the way of everyday life.

But Pentecost doesn't really leave that option on the table.

Many of us, without even realizing it, take on far more responsibility than we were ever meant to carry when it comes to sharing faith. We begin to think that the outcome depends entirely on us—that it is our job to produce belief in someone else.

But that is not our calling.

We are not asked to convert people. We are not asked to manufacture faith in another person's heart. Only the Holy Spirit can produce faith. That work belongs to God alone.

Our calling, is to witness.

To share the good news of Jesus Christ. To tell the truth about what God has done—and what God is doing in our lives.

And then—to trust.

To trust that the same Spirit who moved at Pentecost is still at work today, still speaking, still breathing life, still meeting people in a language they can understand.

Bearing witness is simpler than we often make it.

It can look like offering a prayer for someone in the moment they need it. It can sound like sharing about a feeding ministry or service project that has shaped your life. It can be as personal as reflecting on how God has walked with you through a difficult season. Or as ordinary as giving thanks out loud—for family and friends, for the gift of a new day, for enough food on the table, and even something extra to share.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is that we have something meaningful to say about how God has met us in our lives. So we bear witness—and then we trust the Holy Spirit to do what only the Holy Spirit can do: stir faith.

Friends, you have been given a gift. And you know what it is—and you know what it is for. It is meant to be shared. Through a multitude of languages and expressions. In the furthest corners of

the world and in the everyday spaces of your life. In a million different voices, so that every ear can hear the good news in a way they understand.

Because in that moment, the Holy Spirit fills us again with the good news of the God who steps into our world to meet us—and it is Pentecost all over again.

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