



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FEAST OF PENTECOST, YEAR B, MAY 19, 2024

ACTS 2:1-21; PSALM 104: 25-35, 37; ROMANS 8:22-27; JOHN 15: 26-27, 16: 4b-15

THE LANGUAGE OF HEALING AND HOPE

Acts 2:1-21 *[When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: '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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*"]

The first time Kathy and I went to Paris, we discovered what would become our favorite restaurant to which we have returned time and again. It's in the 7th arrondissement, not

far from the Eifel Tower, but off the crowded thoroughfares, down a sleepy side street. A small establishment, maybe only ten tables plus two more on the sidewalk when pleasant

evenings allow. A place where locals eat a midweek dinner after work before heading home.

The first time we went, I thought I would present with my finest grade school French. To the Matre'd who greeted us as we entered, I said: Deux, s'il vous plait. To which he promptly replied, oh, two with English menus. Come, come.

Perhaps my southern drawl belied me in the moment.

Language is a tricky thing—the principal means by which we humans communicate, and yet so complicated with some 7000 languages spoken in the world today, with overlays of accent, cultural norms and deviations, gestures and body language, diverse phonetics and grammar and syntax, and of course, the dynamics of power within the communicated engagement.

Language is central to the story today, on this Feast of Pentecost, when we hear once more of the city brimming with pilgrims from all parts of the known world, who are treated to the good news spoken by simple folk from Galilee brimming with their new gift of the Holy Spirit who has inspired them to speak these things.

We hear it in straight line narrative from the Acts of the Apostles, but we can imagine it

was a cacophonous melee of language that in any other setting would have led to raised voices, shouting to be heard over one another. Less ecstasy than frustrated fervor.

But on this day, amidst the diverse masses, the Esperanto of the Holy Spirit shone through in an unrushed dialect of connection that every human longs for, if we are really honest, even if we cannot fully understand the mystery undergirding it.

A few weeks ago, the social worker at nearby Lowell Elementary School reached out to ask if I could provide more grocery cards for her to hand to families of students who could use such assistance. As you may know, 25% of the students at Lowell are unhoused, living in shelters or in cars. Since the pandemic, when school breakfasts and lunches closed, and kids were going hungry, we have kept the social worker supplied with grocery cards, using funds from the Clergy Discretionary Fund here, made possible by your generosity, so that these kids and their families might have a little cushion for basic needs.

Kathy walked with me to deliver the gift cards to Angela the social worker. I usually pass them at the door with a brief greeting, but she invited us in, and along with Chelsea the principal they gave us a tour of the repurposed school basement where now there is a clinic operated in coordination with

Children's Hospital, a supply room where families can get coats and shoes for the kids, diapers and other essentials, and a small staff of committed caregivers and caseworkers doing good work, holy work.

What I didn't know until that day was that in the past year, with the burgeoning crisis of refugees seeking asylum and a fresh start here, is that the student body at Lowell Elementary now has 30 languages spoken! Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia. We should hear echoes of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and many more... 30 languages in an elementary school of 400 kids.

Friends, what I want to say to you, is that the language of compassion and dignity is being spoken to those children in ways they can understand, good news to little ones and their families who have made unimaginable journeys to get here. It is a language of healing and hope, the Esperanto of the Holy Spirit is how I would describe it. Right in our backyard.

And Kathy and I were treated, on our brief pilgrimage to that holy space of a school in the heart of this city, in the heart of this neighborhood, we were treated to this language of healing and hope in the midst of an otherwise heartbreaking refugee and homelessness crisis. We were inspired by the good news shared with us that day, which I

count as the Spirit's moving, and which is why I share it with you today. If you are interested in learning more about this ministry and ways for Saint Mark's to support Lowell Elementary, talk to Canon Wendy Barrie, or Cherie Bradshaw, or me.

Here on this Feast of Pentecost, we baptize several children and one adult today. At first inspection, the language of baptism may seem foreign to our ears: waters in which we are buried with Christ in his death... to be cleansed from sin and born again in the risen life of Christ Jesus our Savior... Even talk of renouncing Satan and the spiritual forces of wickedness, and persevering in resisting evil... A straight line read will stop us short every time.

But in the mysteries of the Holy Spirit, we come to understand the language of baptism through prisms of resurrection hope and healing that invites us to renew our covenant with God as we seek to serve Christ in others and respect the dignity of every human being.

We can hear those words, and speak them too, and let them rest on us as tongues of fire, so that we understand more fully that the Spirit of God works in us and through us for good. Our baptismal language invites us to such identity and to such work.

Sustain us, O God, by your Holy Spirit.
Give us inquiring and discerning hearts, the
courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to

know and to love you, and the gift of joy and
wonder in all your works. *Amen.*



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!