

Pentecost Sunday
June 9, 2019

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

A couple of months ago my laptop computer finally called it quits, and I realized that it was time to upgrade to a new one. There is a nonprofit organization called TechSoup that sells computer hardware and software at huge discounts to other nonprofits, so I went looking for a replacement laptop on their web site. I found a deal I couldn't pass up ... a computer with state-of-the-art processor, a solid state hard disc, lots of memory ... all the bells and whistles. However, the computer was a refurbished model ... Grade B which meant that it had visible blemishes, and they wouldn't ... or couldn't ... tell me who made it the computer. It seems that the make of the computer was dependent upon what laptops were available for refurbishing. Yet, at less than \$200 ... with a 20 percent discount off of that ... I figured I'd take the chance.

So, my "new," refurbished computer turns out to be a Dell Latitude laptop. It is outfitted with everything I wanted ... plus extras. How many electronic computers do you know of that come with an analog ruler and letter opener in it? I'm not kidding ... this tiny ruler even has a conversion chart of Fahrenheit to Celsius temperatures, and a template for drawing circles from 1/8" to 1/2". And, this little ruler slips into a tiny slot right next to the CD-Rom reader. WOW! I felt like I hit the jackpot. That was until the computer stopped working.

So, I had to call tech help ... one of my least favorite things to do. There are usually no easy quick fixes. The Tech Help woman said, "Let's try this ..." which required me to restart my computer. When that didn't work, she said, "Well, let's try this other approach." And, so another reboot of the computer.

It was in one of those pauses as we were waiting for the computer to restart that the tech help person asked me, "So what do you do?" I answered, "I'm clergy." There was a short silence and then she said "Clergy?" Realizing she was a little confused I said, "Yes, I'm the pastor of a church in St. Augustine, Florida." "Oh," she said, and there was another short pause, then she said, "I'm born again too."

Then something came up on the screen and we went back to solving the problem. A few minutes later ... these things always take forever ... we were waiting for the computer to do something else and she asked, "What kind of church do you pastor?" I said I was with the Episcopal Church, and again there was this kind of awkward silence, then she said, "I'm Baptist." She then asked me "Why are there so many different kinds of churches?"

So, how does one answer that question in twenty words or less? Finally I said, "Well some people read the Bible one way and some another, so they have different church

denominations. But all of those churches started in the same place ... with the story of Jesus.” Just then, something pop up on my screen and we got back to solving the computer problem. We never returned to her last question, but as I said goodbye I added a “God bless you” and you could almost hear her smile as she “God bless you too.”

Today is Pentecost Sunday. We just heard in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles what that day was like:

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.

And, we heard this lesson this morning read in English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Caribbean English dialect ... and more. All those different languages right here in this little congregation. Of course, this morning was not the same as it was on that first Pentecost when it was Galileans who were speaking all different languages under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Galileans have never been known for their cosmopolitan sophistication. So, for them to speak in all those languages was quite remarkable.

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."

This is the description in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles of that first Pentecost. Fifty days after the empty tomb, during the Jewish festival of Shavout, the followers of Jesus were all together when suddenly the rush of a wind came upon them, and tongues of fire touched each one of them, and then they started jabbering about “God’s deeds of power” in languages that were foreign to them.

Today is Pentecost Sunday ... 50 days after Easter. The crowd gathered in Jerusalem was celebrating the Jewish festival of Shavout. This is the remembrance of Moses bringing down the stone tablets ... God’s Law ... from Mount Sinai. For us Christians it has become the celebration of God’s Spirit coming upon the Church. We celebrate it as we proclaim “God’s deeds of power.” This is more than just a tribute to an event that took place 2,000 years ago; it is about looking around and seeing it happening in our midst today ... right here in this place.

Often this story is paired with the story of the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel story is, of course, the Biblical account of how all these languages came to be in the first place. However, the Tower of Babel story is not just about different languages, but about different cultures and worldviews ... about different peoples. The story of the Tower of Babel is a metaphor about the diversity of humankind. For some that diversity is seen as what separates peoples into “us and them” ... with an emphasis on our differences. However, for others, that diversity is seen as a strength ... that these languages, and cultures, and world-views give us a variety of ways to describe life in all its wonder. That’s exactly what I would have said to the tech help woman if I had had time. It is like a beautifully woven tapestry made of a variety of threads and colors.

Today we, the Church, also speak of “God’s deeds of power” in many languages, and not just the language of different nations. Christians today speak the language of evangelicals and progressives, charismatics and orthodox, Pentecostals and fundamentalists, conservatives and liberals, Trinitarians and Unitarians, those who are “born again” and those who use other words to express their faith.

Even within our own Episcopal Church different congregations speak different languages. It is apparent to me that we ... at St. Cyprian’s ... speak a different “language” and have a different “culture” than many other Episcopal churches even in our own Diocese. Yes, we may use some of the same words, but the “culture” of St. Cyprian’s is more open than many of the other Episcopal Churches around us. Yet, each church, in its own way, is telling of “God’s deeds of power.” At times, we have been invited by our bishop to speak a “language” closer to the “language” of other churches in the Diocese ... to have our “culture” conform to the “culture” of most of the other Episcopal churches around us. However, I believe that we are speaking the “language” that the Holy Spirit has given us to speak ... we are telling “of God’s deeds of power” in this community and at St. Cyprian’s. We are speaking a language and engaged in a culture of radical transforming hospitality that welcomes everyone into our life and leadership.

And, for me at least, this diversity of “God’s deeds of power” isn’t reserved just for Christians. Not only is it different Christian denominations, but it is different faiths that all speak of “God’s deeds of power” and know God’s Spirit coming upon them. I believe that these different languages speak not just to a diversity of culture, but also to a diversity of faith traditions. What we call the “Holy Spirit” may be called something else in a different faith tradition ... but does that make it different? When Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, Unitarians and others gather I believe the Spirit is there ... with all our diversity of faiths and languages.

So, as a congregation that describes itself as “diverse AND inclusive” with radical transforming hospitality as a core value, what keeps us all on the same track ... headed in the same direction? I think it is simple: we are all proclaiming “God’s deeds of power” in our own language, from our own cultural background, and our own worldview. Our diversity in this congregation is multi-dimensional ... traditional and progressive; white, black and Hispanic; Republicans and Democrats; straight and gay; ... and obviously we can speak different languages ... literally. Yet, there seems to be one thing we have in common. I continue to hear of how God works “deeds

of power” in your lives. And, I see how God is working “deeds of power” in the life of this congregation.

We are promised a life in all its fullness; a life in God’s Spirit; a life full of gifts. These gifts of the spirit are outlined in Paul’s words to the Christians in Corinth. According to Paul, some have one gift, some another ... gifts of the Holy Spirit in all their diversity. However, we must remember that they are gifts and not possessions. All too often, our human ego wants to use those gifts to make us individually important, better than those with lesser gifts, and to use those gifts for our sole benefit. However, Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to tell us that each gift makes a valuable contribution to the whole, therefore each has its significance in the entire system. If we all had the same gift to offer we would not only be boring as a community, but incomplete and unable to function as a system. The gifts of the Spirit are our sacred language ... and there are many languages all speaking of “God’s deeds of power.”

Pentecost Sunday: the rush of wind, tongues of fire, speaking in many languages, the gifts of the spirit. Look around you. You are the Body of Christ. You are the ones who live to know the fullness of living in God’s image. You are the people upon whom the gifts of the Spirit have been bestowed. You are the people who speak in many languages of “God’s deeds of power.” God’s wind blows through you, and the fire of God’s Spirit is resting on each one of you.

On that first Pentecost Peter, when the bystanders accuse the disciples of being drunk, responded that it was only 9 o’clock in the morning. He then went on to quote from the prophet Joel that God declares: “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.”

We are the spiritual descendants of those disciples. We are hearing the rush of wind; we are being touched by tongues of fire; and we proclaim “God’s deeds of power” in many languages. We are the Body of Christ in this place. We have made our covenant so that we might live into the fullness of God’s image. As the prophet Joel proclaimed our “sons and daughters shall prophesy;” our young men [and women] will see visions of a better world, a more full community; and our elders shall dream dreams of the “coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.”

Pentecost Sunday: the rush of wind, tongues of fire, speaking in many languages, the gifts of the spirit. You are the people upon whom the gifts of the Spirit are bestowed. You are the people who speak in many languages of “God’s deeds of power.” God’s wind blows through you, and the fire of God’s Spirit is resting on each one of you. The tech help woman I spoke about earlier may not understand different Christian denominations, but I imagine that she speaks of “God’s deeds of power” in her own language, and God’s Spirit is resting on her also.

Amen.