**Pentecost Sunday**

**May 19, 2013**

**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.**

This week I had to call tech help about a problem with my computer. In one of those pauses as we were waiting for the computer to reboot 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,” and then she asked “Why are there so many different kinds of churches?” So, how does one answer that question in twenty words or less? Finally I said, “We are all Christian churches believing in Jesus and the Bible. Some people read the Bible one way and some another, but they all started in the same place.” 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, Portuguese, Italian, Latin, Dutch, Hungarian, Croatian, Swedish, Caribbean English dialect, and American Sign Language. Thirteen 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. And God’s Spirit has come 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.

In our first reading we heard the story of the Tower of Babel … how all these languages came to be in the first place. However, the 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.

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. As many of you know a delegation from St. Cyprian’s met with Bishop John Howard and Canon Alison DeFoor at the Diocesan offices on Maundy Thursday … 53 days ago. As we told the story of St. Cyprians … our past, the present, and our future hopes and vision, it was apparent that we at St. Cyprian’s speak a different “language” than many other Episcopal churches even in our own Diocese … and different even from our Bishop. Yet, each church and each individual, in their own way, is telling of “God’s deeds of power.”

And for me at least, this 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.

So, as a congregation that describes itself as “diverse AND inclusive” 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. But there seems to be one thing 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. But 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.” Remember, the Hebrew word for “spirit” is *ruach* which is also translated as “breath,” and also “wind.” God’s breath is in you, God’s wind blows through you, and the fire of God’s Spirit is resting on each one of you.

Peter, when the bystanders accuse the disciples of being drunk, responds that it is 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 have heard the rush of wind; we have been 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.”

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Amen.