

**Pentecost Sunday
June 5, 2022**

**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.**

I am always impressed by the reading of the lesson from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles by members of the congregation in all the different languages. It is as if we are acting out the reading in real time. And the number and diversity of the languages points to the exposure to the various cultures members of this congregation have experienced in their lifetimes. Not that many of us can understand each of the languages as those at the first Pentecost did ... but it gets the point across. Thank all of you for your contribution.

There are some who say that this Pentecost story is about the reversal of another the story ... the tale of the Tower of Babel. If you remember, the story of the Tower of Babel was about the world with only one language, and the people decided to build a tower to reach God. God didn't really like this idea, so God destroyed the tower, and in the process caused the peoples to begin to speak different languages so that they could never again have the power to coordinate their resources and build another tower.

However, the story we heard this morning isn't about everyone speaking the same language as if the Tower of Babel were reversed. Rather, it is about all the people who were gathered from different countries speaking their own languages, yet God's sacred spirit allowed everyone the ability to understand each language ... and all these people from different cultures were included. Here, at the very inception of the Christian Church, diversity and inclusion is expressed as a primary value.

However, our reading of this morning's lesson in different languages is not just an expression of the variety of the backgrounds and cultures that people in this congregation have experienced. It is also an expression of our understanding of a faith that has room for everyone, regardless of their background, or culture, or anything else about them.

Language is powerful. As the story of the Tower of Babel, and this morning's reading from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles tell us, language can unite us, and it can divide us ... it was true then, and it is true today.

Before there was any language as we know it, there was a language that God spoke that had the power to bring about the creation of this world as we know it. According to the opening words in the Book of Genesis, "God said, "Let there be light."

Yet, some words mean different things in different languages, and some words mean different things even in the same language. Those same opening verses of the Book of Genesis gives us an example.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a WIND from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light." ...

"While a WIND from God ... " The Hebrew word for "wind" is "ruach." However, "ruach" has several meanings in Hebrew. It also means "breath" ... and it also means "spirit." So, those verses from Genesis could read, "while a BREATH from God swept over the face of the waters ..." or "while a SPIRIT from God swept over the waters ..."

The story in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles this morning is about God's sacred spirit ... that we Christians call the Holy Spirit ... coming upon those gathered at the Jewish festival of Shavout. Yet the story tells us that it was not a gentle, pastoral spirit, rather there was a "violent" wind, and "divided tongues, as of fire ..." God's sacred spirit came upon those gathered as a ferocious storm. God's breath felt hot, like tongues of fire.

So, take a deep breath. Listen to the sound of your breath as you inhale. Hold your breath for a moment, then exhale and listen to that sound. There are those who say those two sounds of inhaling and exhaling are the root of the name of God, "YAHWEH." "YAH" on the inhale ... "WEH" on the exhale. Every breath we take is the name of God ... and every breath you take is a blessing from God.

As most of you know, Caren and I have just returned from Albuquerque, New Mexico, where our daughter, Jamie lives with her husband, Neal, and three of Jamie's four children ... Jax, Marian, and Eldon. Jamie's oldest daughter, Andie, lives with her husband Brian in Seattle. We made the trip to Albuquerque to be with the family and celebrate as Jax graduated from high school.

[Jax was a National Honor Society student, and one of only 30 International Baccalaureate students in the Albuquerque school system. In 2020 he was living with his father in St. Augustine and attending Pedro Menedez High School. During spring break he flew to Tulsa, Oklahoma to spend a week with his mother, Jamie. But then COVID hit. He never returned to St. Augustine. He finished his sophomore year of high school as a virtual Florida student. The family then moved to Albuquerque, and during his junior year, and part of his senior year of high school he was ... like all his classmates ... a virtual student attending classes by Zoom. It was only in the second half of his senior year that he attended in-person classes at Sandia High School ... yet he excelled!]

During our time in Albuquerque the largest wildfire in New Mexico's history was raging in the mountains near of Santa Fe, about 70 to 80 miles northeast of Albuquerque. At times, the wind

would carry the smoke all the way into the city, and the dry, gusty winds ... even where we were ... were so violent that they caused temporary power outages.

Wind ... fire ... breath ... spirit.

The fires ... and the winds ... were not the only things moving in New Mexico. With every breath I took, I heard God's name ... and I heard God's sacred spirit calling ... *"it is time ... it is time."*

After much prayerful consideration and long conversations with Caren ... and many deep breaths ... it is time. After almost fifty years of ordained ministry, and fourteen years as Vicar of St. Cyprian's I will retire at the end of September ... my last Sunday will be September 25.

Like many of you, Caren and I are in the last chapter of our lives. When I began my ministry here I was sixty-four years old. I will be seventy-eight later this month. My health has changed over the past decade-plus, and I no longer have the strength and stamina I once had ... it is just part of getting older ... I think many of you know what I'm talking about.

And I have two grandchildren ... Marian, who is eleven, and Eldon, who is ten ... that I had never met until last year. I had never met them partly because I had not taken the time away from this parish ministry to visit them ... and partly because I had stubbornly held a grudge that was my own doing. With only a few years left to live, I don't have time for grudges ... and I have to use what time I have left for the relationships that matter most to me. Those relationships ... with Caren who has been as much a part of the ministry here as I have ... time with our children scattered across this country ... and time with all our grandchildren ... in Albuquerque, Chicago, and Seattle. When Caren and I leave St. Augustine we will move to Albuquerque ... at least for the next few years.

When I first came to St. Augustine to visit daughter Jamie and her family who lived down the street (in the house that John Wooldridge and Melissa Southwell now live), Caren and I would walk by St. Cyprian's. She once said to me, "That would make a good gig in retirement," and I rolled my eyes. In fact, it has been a good gig for me ... the best of my career. God's sacred spirit led me to St. Cyprian's. The congregation was decimated and demoralized after the schism in 2006. Caren and I had tools in our toolbox to offer a path forward. Together, with the small congregation at the time, God's sacred spirit led us out of the wilderness and into new territory.

I give thanks to all the people of St. Cyprian's ... those who were here fourteen years ago ... and those who are here today for the first time ... for giving me the opportunity to have a ministry like the one I always dreamed ministry could be.

I have never know a more generous community. You have been generous with your financial resources to support the various ways in which we have shared God's love for the world in this

corner of God's vineyard. You have been generous with the time and talents you choose to lend to express our passion for justice. And you have always been generous in your spirit ... generous in your spirit of compassion, acceptance, inclusion, forgiveness, comfort, empathy, and joy. You are all that I have desired ... hoped for ... and prayed for my entire ministry. I thank you ... and I thank God's sacred spirit for this opportunity to leave this community of faith in a better place than I found it.

St. Cyprian's has a strong future. This community now has a strong foundation upon which to build. Your faith in God's spirit will lead you to new challenges and new ministries. The same spirit ... the same wind ... the same breath of God that came upon those gathered in Jerusalem two thousand years ago is also with you today. The languages you speak are gifts to us all ... each contribution is welcomed as a sign of St. Cyprian's commitment to seeing every human being as a beloved child of God ... a beloved child of God calling God's name with each breath.

We have a few months left together to listen to God's sacred spirit. I will be taking many deep breaths ... calling God's name and feeling blessed. I hope you will do the same.

Amen.