

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Day of Pentecost – May 19th, 2024 (11:11 am)

SPEAKING OTHER LANGUAGE

Psalm 139:1-16

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27; 16:4-15

The Holy Spirit Brings the Dead to Life by the Righteousness of Christ

In returning to His Father by way of the cross and resurrection, Christ Jesus sends “*the Helper*” to His Church, that is, “*the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father.*” The Spirit testifies of Christ and glorifies Him by taking what is His and declaring it to the world in the preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (John 15:26; 16:7, 14). He convicts the world of sin by the word of the Law, He forgives sins and justifies sinners by the Word of the Gospel, and He bestows the faith that says “Amen” to this righteousness of God (John 16:8–11). Therefore, the Lord pours out His Spirit on the apostles, that by their preaching, the Spirit should be given to His entire Church. As the multitudes are gathered from all the nations by “*this sound,*” that is, by the preaching of “*the mighty works of God*” in Christ Jesus, so does God the Father pour out the Spirit of His Son “*on all flesh*” (Acts 2:6, 11, 17). The Lord God breathes upon the slain, and so shall they live; for so the Lord has spoken, and He shall do it (Ezek. 37:5–14).

What language other than English do you feel able to speak? You might say “I can only speak English, Pastor. That’s it.” I would guess though, that you can speak at least one more language besides your mother tongue.

Today we celebrate *Pentecost*, when we remember the miracle of the tongues of fire in Jerusalem. The disciples spoke in different languages to reach different people and nations with the Gospel.

Do you think this gift can be manifested still today? Well, God is God and He surely can do it whenever and if it pleases Him. Reality is though, that we don’t see it very often, I mean, as a event where you see someone, or you yourself starting to speak a language that is completely unknown to them. But I am sure we all can speak to this day, and almost every day, another language. *The language that our neighbour understands.*

SPEAKING THE NATIONS’ LANGUAGE – PENTECOST

Speaking of that Pentecost in Jerusalem, could we have a guess on why that special gift was poured out on the disciples?

I would say that this may be read as a “Divine push” on the disciples to start doing what Jesus commanded them, that is, sharing the Gospel with all the world. But it also

shows that *God is always the One doing the job*. We will try to do our best, but our best is never sufficient, Our sufficiency comes from God, from the Holy Spirit. He goes ahead of us opening the doors for the Gospel.¹

Now, in that specific day, there was a communication issue: different languages were involved, not only Greek or Hebrew/Aramaic, as people from different areas were present. Then the Holy Spirit came to change the situation. At the very outset of the missionary endeavour of the Christian Church, God gives two powerful tips to them:

- **It is God the Holy Spirit who is The Missionary.** The apostles, and all Christians by extension, are the *instruments* of His work.

- **When we speak the language that our neighbour can understand,** they receive through ears and eyes, in their hearts, the message of the Messiah.

Let's take a break here to speak specifically about the gift of speaking in tongues. First thing, **they spoke actual tongues**, not new ones. No "tongue of the angels" type of thing. *Now, would it still be possible today for a person, out of the blue, to start speaking a language they never learned?* There has been some extensive debate on that. I would sum up the way we Lutherans look at it:

- * Of course it may happen still today, since God is Almighty, and He may grant this gift *when* and *if* it pleases Him. Mark this well: **to HIM**. Not me, not you, not any "anointed" pastor or minister, not in a specific day and time in our Church. If that happens, **it is all HIS action**.

- * Now, if it comes to happen somewhere, it will have a clear purpose. St Paul instructs us: It is better for the Church that you would speak one word that everybody will understand than a thousand unintelligible words. Because it would be meant to build the Church up, and not as a talent show off.

Back to the Pentecost feast as a whole. It is the feast of the Christian Church where we remember:

- * God created a special event to make the Gospel be shared to the heart of thousands of people.

- * God still creates special opportunities for us to speak another tongue.

"To speak another tongue? Which one?"

¹ Another aspect to be considered: the feast of Pentecost was a special date to thousands of Jews who would come from different nations to celebrate it in Jerusalem. The city would double its size as it accommodated everybody. All those Jews were a great target for the preaching of the Gospel, since they were very familiar with the promise of the coming Messiah.

SPEAKING ANOTHER LANGUAGE - TODAY

Yes, I am sure God the Holy Spirit has enabled you to speak more than one language. I would guess that you had at least one opportunity during the past week to do so. Think about it:

- Someone you had a fight with and you have not reconciled yet;
- Someone you really admire but never expressed it to them – which would be of great help for them;
- Someone you love and have not for a long time said so. “I love you”;
- Some relationship that could be fostered to grow into an opportunity to share your faith;
- Someone needing someone to listen to them, to lend a hand or a shoulder;
- Someone you have some problems with, and you keep saying to yourself: “I’m not taking the first step. He or she might as well do it and...”
- Someone in need that you would understand them, resulting in you being also able to speak the language they can understand.
- Above all, as Christians: there are many people around us, sometimes even inside our family, our inner circle in need to hear the Gospel of hope, who need to be encouraged in their faith, who need to be drawn near to Jesus again. Someone in need of *someone like you*, who by the action and power of the Holy Spirit was given the precious gift of the marvelous, redeeming, freeing and consoling Word of God. The Word that provides strength, help, happiness and balance to life. Just like the disciples did. And 3,000 were baptized in that day. You might be not leading as many to Christ; or leading them back to Him. It may be just one.

God gave this gift of speaking another person’s language to each Christian – because it is not a matter of speaking only; it is also a matter of looking, smiling, being close, crying with the mourners and being happy with the overjoyed, bringing a hug, showing love – not only in words but in also deeds we speak the language our neighbour understands.

How can I draw a conclusion like this? One of the passages that underscores this understanding is Matthew 25, when Jesus depicts the Day of Judgment. “For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” We know we are not saved by works, it’s faith alone. But *works follow faith*. Works are the way God acts through us to show his Love and mercy to all. In a

way then, Jesus said: For I was in such and such situation, *and you came and spoke by faith the language I could understand.*

CFW Walther writes: ***“We cannot think that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is something that happened to the apostles only. The same thing repeats itself every year. Because we along with the people at all times and in all places, can share in the main gift the apostles received: the gift of the Holy Ghost himself”.***²

God the Holy Ghost lit the fire of faith in our hearts at our Baptism, or at our conversion. He still outpours His gifts so that we can go and share the Gospel of Christ. It may be in a different language other than our mother tongue, even out of our comfort zone tongue. We still are sent by Him to speak another language – the one that our neighbour will understand.

PENTECOST is a day and a Feast of the Church where we can thank our God for giving us His gifts – especially the gift of being able to communicate with our neighbour, bringing them the reason of the hope that is in our hearts. **The language we all know how to speak because He has enabled us to: FAITH IN ACTION THROUGH LOVE.** Amen.

² WALTHER, CFW. *God Grant it. Daily Devotions.* p.454.