

Sermon Text for June 8, 2025

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Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-14

“Now you’re speaking my language”

Today is the day that we proclaim that the church of Jesus Christ across the world was given birth through the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and so as a result I think it is appropriate that we sing happy birthday to the church. I meet with a group of men on Friday mornings at my house and some other houses and we are currently going through a book by Dallas Willard called Hearing God.

He makes a statement in this book in regards to hearing God that some might find controversial, and other might find offensive. You know how often we might find ourselves saying: I wish God would make things more clear, just come down and tell us what to do, speak to us like he did to Paul on the road to Damascus, or show up in a burning Azalea like he did to Moses, or in some way manifest himself supernaturally so that we can hear him and understand what his desire is for our life for a certain decision or whatever it might be. I think we have all found ourselves wishing we could hear the literal voice of God for some reason in our lives.

Willard states that this desire comes from an undeveloped relationship with God where we understand God’s presence in our lives only in the supernatural. It is an immature desire because in Scripture we see very few miracles and very few times when God reveals himself in the world in this way. God, instead, works in Scripture, and so also in our lives, in the every day events and the mundane happenings around us, we just aren’t in tune with God enough through prayer and Scripture readings to understand the language that God is speaking. God is always speaking, we just don’t understand His language because we don’t choose to spend time in his presence enough.

Our desire to hear God supernaturally should be replaced by a desire to be in the presence of God daily, then we will have more clarity and hear and understand God’s direction in our lives better. The disciples on the day of Pentecost are still huddled together in a room by themselves 50 days after Easter, nearly two months after Easter, and 10 days after they are chastised by the angel on the day of Ascension telling them, why are you looking up into heaven, Jesus isn’t here anymore, get to work! They are still huddled together afraid, unsure of what comes next, desire and wishing for a sign from heaven because that is all they have as this young, immature church looking for God’s presence in only one way, the supernatural, thinking this is the only way they are going to hear and understand God’s language.

Today, the church is born, it is the birthday of the church and God gives the church for its birthday the gift of proclamation and understanding. Let's read.

READ

Our first reading of the Tower of Babel is often thought of as the foil through which we can understand the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is often seen as returning to the period of time before Babel, before God confused the languages. That isn't my approach, but many think that and believe that. In the very first verse of our reading we see what the problem is, and some read it thinking that this is a good thing. "Now the whole earth had one language and the same words." Some may think this is a good thing. I know that as I have ministered around the world I have not always used the correct words as I refer to Scripture. I have mistaken the word lighting in the Bible with tuna and so I once read: in Revelation 4:5 as I described the power of God. I also once read in I Peter 2:1 the importance of ridding ourselves of rumors, or gossip and I said...

It would be nice to have one language as we travel around the world experiencing the beauty of God's creation, but Genesis 11 warns us of the dangers of one language. One language allows God's people to focus on themselves and what they have done for themselves and how far they have come, to coordinate together to make brick so that a building can be made to reach up to heaven, even God himself. It distracts us from our reliance upon God and how we ought to live for God and for God alone.

When we coordinate in this way we raise ourselves up and not God then we betray the reason why God created us in the first place. We read in a lasting truth in Psalm 127:1, someone here read that out loud, Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. It is fun to build things on our own, with our own power, but without the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the construction of whatever it is, it is in vain. It will lead to ruin. The solution for God in the building of this Tower of Babel is to go from one language to many languages and so the people will be scattered across the face of the earth, which forces people to rely upon God for salvation and deliverance as opposed to people.

The day of Pentecost is a time where the people of God are able to say in unison: Now you're speaking my language, in more ways than one. The disciples are huddled in a room together, there is a lot of them, and they experience the supernatural presence of God which isn't reserved for just them, but all the people gathered in Jerusalem heard and were impacted by what the disciples experienced. This supernatural presence of God, tongues of fire, the sound of a

mighty rushing wind that fills the room and the surrounding area as well, is what a frightened, young and immature community needs in order to get out of that room and into the world.

This story of Pentecost that we read every year is a challenge to all of us who regard the presence of the Holy Spirit as this exotic phenomenon of purely personal significance, while we see that is in no way what the Holy Spirit is in the church, it is for the community, it builds up the community, it sends the community out into the world, it provides the community the power of proclamation so that all will hear and understand.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is not one single language that all must bow down to. No, it is the ability to proclaim God's deeds of power in many languages, through many cultures and settings and to hear and understand each other on each other's terms, and not on one monolithic approach that all must bow down to. This is the power of the Holy Spirit is that it moves through the people of God in ways that is recognized and embraced by the world, instead of forcing the world to be like you.

The central passage in our reading is found in vs.11 where we read that what people are hearing is unified, the message is the same, but the messengers and the languages are all different, very, very different. The same message is the proclamation of God's deeds of power. The vast array of people who were gathered represent the world who did not have to give up their language or their culture or their heritage in order to understand what the Holy Spirit was saying, no, they were able to receive the proclamation on their own terms and through their own understanding. Here, the Holy Spirit is the engine that drives the church into the world, and welcomes the world into the church.

It seems as if some within the church in this country want God to limit his love and grace to just one homogenous group of people, almost as if we are reverting back to one language, one way of seeing the world. Pentecost is not about uniformity or conformity, but rather about embracing the diversity that we find present in the world. I hate it that diversity is a buzz word now that has been taken hostage by one group of people in our culture to mean only one specific thing. It is the same with the term evangelical that has been taken hostage by the other side of culture to describe a church that doesn't look like anything that I have seen in Scripture.

Pentecost is about speaking a language the people understand. That's the point of vs.11 that the diversity found within that community is about strangers united in Jesus, in God's deeds of power. The once timid disciples somehow find their tongues to proclaim the truth of Christ. In some ways we are diverse community, maybe not in the way that some use the word diversity.

But our political spectrum is wide and far, but we have thrived and survived because we speak each other's language in regards to Jesus.

God's deeds of power is what we experience here, is what our children experience, is what as Joel states is manifested in our young women and old men. We don't build our own towers and silos based upon ideological flags that could devolve as being the most important thing to us. The most important thing to us is the living in these deeds of power that God has showered upon us through the Holy Spirit. That is our emphasis. We don't pick up and go if someone disagrees with us, we live together to understand how Scripture helps us understand why we see things differently. It is easy to pick up and go, it is hard to stay and speak each other's language, to learn it, and to live in it.

We have learned here, like the disciples huddled at Pentecost in that single room, to focus on God's deeds of power which we find in reaching out in concern to those within the Matthew 25 context. If we agree that the day of Pentecost gave us as the church the gift of proclamation through the power of the Holy Spirit, what does that look like in this church? It has looked like us pursuing Matthew 25 as a form of proclamation. We are feeding the hungry in our food bank, we are clothing the naked, giving shelter, providing water to drink through our CIC program that meets material needs, we open our space to AA and Our Table as a way in which to have an impact upon our community and those in need.

But Matthew 25 also describes the same importance in welcoming the stranger. We have emphasized Matthew 25 in all of these things, but never really in welcoming the stranger. That is going to change over these next few months. Today the stranger is in our midst and the stranger is being besieged and not welcomed, which is contrary to what we would want. So we have to do something about it just like we did something about those who are hungry around us. We have a Gospel responsibility to find ways to welcome the stranger which is found in Scripture 50 different times, not just once in Matthew 25.

Some of us may feel as if this is a bit political, but before you make that judgment call I want you to consider this. First of all, we know each other, and I believe you know me well enough that I wouldn't want the church to do anything that isn't commanded by Scripture, I hope you trust my motives on all things is to follow God's command as laid out in Scripture. Secondly, how are we using this word political? When I preach about God's desire for marriage to be between a man and a woman, is that political or is that Scriptural? When I preach that God's love for all even, even the unborn life, is that Scriptural or is that political? Maybe, just maybe, we are labeling those things that we agree with as Scriptural, and those things that we

disagree with as political, when all along Scripture has something to say about all of it, we just may not agree with it.

It is Scriptural when I say that we are called to welcome the stranger. When we proclaim God's deeds of power through the Holy Spirit we just might see God work through us as he did with the early church. When that happens, well, our prayer ought to be that we get the same results as the early church. We should be able to hear people ask the question that we find in vs.37: what must I do to be saved, and that will make it all worth while. Amen.