

**May 28, 2023**  
**“Spiritually Speaking”**  
**1 Corinthians 12:4-12 / Acts 2:1-18**  
**Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin**

“In the beginning ...”

“In the beginning ...”

When I say those words, just those three words, most of you likely have a pretty good idea of what comes next. It is likely the most well-known literary beginning.

“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 – a WIND, the Hebrew word, *ruach*, meaning wind, breath or spirit – swept over the face of the waters.” Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1.

Some ancient translations read “when God began to create” instead of “when God created” – a subtle difference perhaps, but an appropriate and compelling nod to the ongoing unfolding of creation in which we are called to be partners with God. Creating vitality out of the void, community out of the chaos.

“In the beginning when God began to create the heavens and the earth ...” Though the story of Creation from Genesis itself is not meant to be taken literally, the rest of the story – as they say – is history.

Or, in fact, the rest of the story is right now. This moment. This day. Which is to say, the rest of the story of Creation is ours to write, as co-creators with God.

Which brings us to Pentecost. The Jewish festival of *Shavout*, the Festival or Feast of Weeks – originally a harvest festival and now celebrating the giving of the Law, *Torah*. Celebrated 50 days after Passover, the day after seven weeks, seven Sabbaths.

Pentecost then – literally, from the Greek word, meaning fiftieth – celebrated by Christians 50 days after Easter.

And with the early followers of Jesus gathered together, Jesus having previously promised God's Spirit as Advocate, constant companion to be with them always, through thick and thin, "there came suddenly from heaven a sound like the sweeping of a mighty wind..." – a WIND, here the Greek word transliterated, *pnoé* (NAW-AY), like *ruach*, meaning wind, breath or spirit, "and it filled the entire house where they were sitting."

We are meant to hear in these words the stirring of Creation, the sweeping and powerful divine wind, breath, spirit, now stirring a new creation.

Then we get the mystical tongues of fire, resting on each one gathered and filling them with God's Holy Spirit so that each one begins to speak in "other tongues just as the Spirit gave them to speak." The text from Acts goes into some detail to point out how diverse the crowd was that gathered that day, "devout Jews from every nation under heaven."

So picture it. ALL these different people, speaking ALL these different languages, yet, YET, each person hears and understands in their own native language.

The mighty Spirit of God manifests as a built-in translator. Simultaneous translation without the modern technology to which we are now accustomed, and which may actually dull our sense of sheer awe and wonder at what's actually taking place.

But picture it. It IS a miracle. We can understand why those gathered were at once confused, amazed and astounded. They can't make sense of what is happening because it doesn't make sense.

Many languages, many gifts, one Spirit, as we are reminded in the text from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. One body, many parts.

The story of Pentecost is a story of community. Not unity; unity is overrated and frankly, unrealistic. Community is the goal here, community around which is centered the common good.

"The wind of Pentecost," writes theologian and author, Norm Carroll, "... does not blow lightly. Rather, it explodes in a new creation, a new set of human relationships, a new people born of the divine beyond, and driving humanity to a divine destiny."

Pentecost marks for us our divine and collective destiny to join in work for the common good. For justice, and with it, peace. A new and ever unfolding creation that calls us to seek and find the common good across our many differences. That is the mark of God's Spirit in our midst.

Again from our 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians reading, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

At Easter, through the risen Christ, we celebrate the PROMISE of new life in the midst of death; at Pentecost, through the rising, translating Spirit, we celebrate the PRACTICE of new life in the midst of difference and division.

Which brings me back to the tongues of fire. The reason EACH person is able to hear and understand EACH other in their own native language is because they are, in essence, speaking the same language.

And forgive the cheese factor, but that language is love – because love is God's language. Pentecost is a powerful reminder for us that, as spiritual teacher and author Gary Zukav suggests, "love is all there is."

"Eventually," he writes, "you will come to understand that love heals everything, and love is all there is."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin says that "Love is the most universal, the most tremendous, and the most mystical of cosmic forces. It is like the blood of spiritual evolution."

Pentecost is the mark of our ongoing spiritual evolution, attuned, in community with each other, to the presence of God's Spirit moving – ALWAYS moving – in our midst. Within and around us.

When we speak in tongues of love, we are speaking universally as God does – and so we are better able to hear and understand each other as God's beloved. We are better able to build and sustain what Dr. King called the beloved community.

That is the miracle of Pentecost ongoing. Pentecostal fire represents the passion with which we are called to love. And Pentecostal love, made known to us in Jesus, is nothing short of Divine love. Agape love. Unconditional love.

It is, as Jesus makes clear, love of God and neighbor and self, even love of enemy, of those we find most difficult to love.

It's the love described elsewhere in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, "If I speak in the tongues," the TONGUES, "of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal."

It is love that requires us to speak and act IN and WITH love. Divine love. Agape love. Unconditional love. Easier said than done, no doubt, but that is the standard. That is the only thing that can and does bring us together across our divisions and differences. That is the only way we can and do hear and understand each other.

So spiritually speaking, that's the title of this sermon. SPIRIT-ually speaking, we are called to speak, passionately, in and with tongues of love. And act accordingly.

In her book, *Gifts in Open Hands*, pastor Maren Tirabassi writes about Pentecost:

*"This year it is the languages  
that ... speak to me, in me, through me  
not even so much celebrating  
the holy, beautiful syllabification  
of global diversity,  
or the most successful sermon ever  
giving birth to a church,  
as one hundred twenty people  
being willing to speak*

*without being in control of their words.  
We all have learned this –  
how we said the right thing at the right time  
buried in ordinary conversation,  
or a small public courage  
of naming truth we didn't know we knew.  
This year my simple pentecost  
is just lending my tongue to something  
someone needs to hear,  
because I am waiting in the right place,  
and willing to open my mouth."*

Lending our tongues, our words, our actions, our lives, to something someone needs. Willing to open our mouths, to work with our hands, to walk with our feet, to stand in solidarity with our bodies, in service to the common good – with its divine emphasis on those most vulnerable.

So filled with the Spirit of Pentecost and of Creation, swept up by the divine winds, enlivened by the divine breath, and touched by the passionate tongues of fire, may we be so much more, together, than noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.

IN a world and IN a church marked by so much hatred and division and violence and CHAOS, and TOWARD a world and church marked instead by COMMUNITY, by the common good, may we be those who risk standing in the gaps.

Daring to speak, SPIRIT-ually, with tongues of faith and hope.

Daring to speak with tongues of mercy and grace.

Daring to speak with tongues of compassion and hospitality.

With tongues of humility and self-reflection.

With tongues of equity and inclusion.

With tongues of righteous anger and rage.

With tongues of justice and peace.

With tongues of love, welcoming the winds of change, building beloved community out of chaos, practicing new life in the face of deep difference and division.

In that Spirit, friends, the very Spirit of Pentecost present then and present now and always, let me close with this prayer from Mennonite pastor Joanna Harader:

*Flaming God of Pentecost,  
Let us speak in tongues of comfort  
to those weeping over the bodies of their loved ones  
shot by troubled gunmen, killed in border clashes, dying from (disease).*

*Let us speak in tongues of courage  
to those living in fear  
of the next shooting, the next bomb, the illness that threatens.*

*Let us speak in tongues of condemnation  
against laws and policies that promote violence,  
prioritizing the preferences of some over the lives of others.*

*Let us speak in tongues of care  
for the most vulnerable in our world—  
human beings, animals, and ecosystems.*

*Let us speak in tongues of love  
for you and for your people,  
that your language might be our language.*

*And when our tongues are still,  
when we have no words to speak,  
let our hearts burn with your fire,  
let our ears hear your words in our own native tongue,  
let our skin feel the wind of your Spirit —  
a mighty wind, blowing where it will.  
Amen.*

May it be so.