

Now You're Talking My Language!

[Text - Acts 2:1-21]

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On the day of Pentecost, “the disciples were all together in one place. Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a mighty 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 the ability.” On that magnificent day, each of Jesus’ followers boldly proclaimed the Good News of Divine Love and Grace in ways and words that were new and literally *foreign* to them. Their fiery enthusiasm then flowed into the streets, spread throughout the entire city, and eventually, throughout the entire world!

On this magnificent day, you and I can also experience the Holy Spirit leading us and speaking to us in fresh and exciting ways. We can hear the ancient words of Sacred Scripture spring to new life, through the Spirit’s inspiration and insight. We can recognize the voice of our Still-Speaking God in the words and wisdom of contemporary authors, poets and musicians. And perhaps best of all, we can feel the Spirit’s Living, Loving Presence in and among this welcoming and inclusive Family of Faith. In this morning’s Continuing Testament, Grace Imathiu writes that “Pentecost is the powerful entry of the Holy Spirit into our lives to rearrange our world in surprisingly new ways...Suddenly the differences between people ...are not something to fear, but something to appreciate. Pentecost is like wearing new glasses and suddenly our sight is restored to see that we are much more connected than we ever imagined!”

There are certainly many things in this world and our society that can pull us apart. Unfortunately there are meanspirited people who work very hard to drive wedges between rich and poor, Black and White, Christian and Muslim, gay and straight. Fortunately, the Divine Remedy for such divisiveness is the Holy Spirit’s amazing ability to

make people *holy* and to make us *whole* - to remind us that we are *all* beloved daughters and sons of our One Divine Source. This is the essential message and the mission to which we dedicate ourselves here at Brecksville United Church of Christ - a mission which is succinctly stated on the cover of every Sunday bulletin: "Loving, Serving, and Accepting All People with God's Life-Changing Power!" That "power" is the power of the Holy Spirit - the same Spirit which calls us to this mission and inspires us to carry it faithfully forward.

On that Pentecost long ago, the Holy Spirit gathered people from many different cultures, languages and backgrounds, and brought them together as One. On this Pentecost, we also come from a variety of different places and backgrounds, to worship and serve together as One. Occasionally on Pentecost Sunday I like to do something which provides a beautiful visual image of how the Holy Spirit brings us together from divergent places. Unlike those gathered in Jerusalem, few of us come from such exotic places as Mesopotamia or Cappadocia, Phrygia or Pamphylia [wherever *that* is]; nevertheless, we do come from a wide variety of locations and Life-experiences. So this morning, to get a picture of how the Spirit continues to call and gather people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds, I'd like you to stand, as you are able, to signify where the Holy Spirit began working in your life.

If you were born after 1957, and raised in the present day United Church of Christ, please stand. If your background was with the earlier Congregational Christian Church or Evangelical/Reformed...Lutherans... Presbyterians... No particular church background...Methodist... Brethren...Buddhist...Baptist...Orthodox...Muslim... Christian Science...Episcopal...Disciples of Christ.. Roman Catholic.... As we can see, it's from an eclectic ecclesiastical mix that the Holy Spirit brings us together as One to this particular time and place. And by the power of that One Spirit, you and I are inspired and enabled to speak the Spirit's One Universal Language: The language of inclusive love and Life-affirming grace!

I think it would have been awesome [though a bit overwhelming] to see and hear so many different people, speaking so many different languages on that Pentecost, long ago. Yet the purpose of that phenomenon was actually quite simple. The work of the Spirit on *that* Pentecost was to make sure that everyone was included; that no one miss-out on the Good News of Jesus Christ because of linguistic, cultural, or social differences. I believe that the Holy Spirit desires the exact same thing on *this* Pentecost: that no one be excluded; that all feel welcomed, warmed and embraced by the Spirit's loving and gracious Presence.

On that first Pentecost, the overwhelming outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a sure-fire way to remind Christ's followers that the love, forgiveness, and acceptance that Jesus so freely extended to them, could only live and thrive if they themselves freely offered it to others. That's a good thing for us to remember on *this* Pentecost: that the Holy Spirit fires-up our faith so that you and I might also extend the gracious love of Christ to all people, whoever they are and wherever they may be. Even those in far-flung places like Phrygia or Pamphylia, Parma or Parma Heights!