

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent 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 ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

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Known in Our Own Language

John Wyon was a tall man, with a shock of white hair. He'd been born in Britain, became a doctor, and as a conscientious objector in WWII had served in a

Quaker hospital in Ethiopia during the war. John went on to spend years in India, working among rural villages, the only Western-trained doctor serving 1 million people. People who met him noted his gentle ways. His wife, who served on the Church Vestry with me, told me John reminded her of Jesus -- not an accolade every wife uses for every husband.

Over time John Wyon became an expert in global public health issues, and taught at the Harvard School of Public Health, about how whole populations could become more healthy when key practices were adopted widely by communities --from childhood immunizations, to birth control to AIDs prevention.

But John's most ground-breaking discovery was not *what* should be done medically--Western science had already discovered cures. Rather, John's insight was *how* to communicate the needed medical protocols. How local communities could be convinced, by foreigners like himself, to consider new approaches, including western medicines, at a time when communities had *every right* to be suspicious of what westerners might be imposing on them. John worked in places that had been brutally colonized. His patients, and the leaders of their countries would have been fools *not* to be suspicious of white-coated, white-skinned doctors with sharp needles aimed at their infants. And they were no fools.

But despite these obstacles, public health became far more advanced in Bangladesh than in other countries, despite the huge population and extreme poverty there, because in Bangladesh, Western doctors had not tried to impose medical insights through the ways we learn in the West: perhaps through TV and public service announcements, or through experts speaking in newspapers, through power structures we value.

Rather, in Bangladesh, doctors had worked through the communication structures most important in that society: the weekly large markets, to which women from a network of surrounding villages would bring their produce, and sit and confer as they sold their goods. It was in these markets that relatives caught up on news; that different techniques of growing and harvesting were discussed and debated; that details of health conditions and successful treatments were exchanged.

In Bangladesh, the western doctors learned, certain women were highly respected advisers at the markets, sought out by others for their wisdom and knowledge; if *these women* became convinced of the efficacy of certain treatments, they would share them with others at the market, and the practices would quickly spread within that area. News then could be passed to broader regions because women entrepreneurs *literally* met at key crossroads and spoke.

John Wyon and his students made breakthroughs in global public health affecting millions because they learned *to deeply respect* and *value* the existing

communication networks in Bangladesh, rather than assume that Western ways of communication were superior, or even applicable.

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John Wyon taught me about Pentecost. About the critical need to not only have the right message, but to be able -- and willing -- to convey it in a way that can be heard, and understood, and trusted. The importance of speaking in the language of those you're trying to teach -- not just the right dialect, but through channels that honor those who are listening.

About the power, as a listener, of being taught in *your own native language*, the way on Pentecost all of those gathered in the room with the disciples suddenly heard their own languages, being spoken by the disciples. Suddenly God's message was coming to everyone very clearly; it didn't need translation.

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Have you ever been in a foreign land, where you had to struggle to understand what was being said; where you could not read the street signs and even simple travel or the most common transactions required all your energy and attention? And then suddenly you find someone who understands you, who can quickly get you to your destination, or explain the dilemma in which you've been caught? What a relief to find someone who speaks your language!

Even within our own tongue, it can be hard to communicate effectively across types. Remember the best seller in the 1980's; Men are Mars, and Women are from Venus...? And what about parents and their adult children or teens unable to understand each other's context, and different life assumptions: "You quit your job before you had another?" "You wore *what* to your interview?"

How do we find the right words and ways to communicate what we mean? That won't be misunderstood? That set the tone and nuance that will be all important, if we want to get across something important?

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Imagine God feeling the same way. Wondering how to communicate with us, in a way we will understand? To use *your* particular language. To think through whether *you* will be most affected by a sunrise over water, or the cascade of a waterfall; whether you will hear love most in the gentle musical notes of a solo flute, the rhythmic pulses of hand drumming, or the powerful chords of a massive organ.

When you have someone you love very much, don't you try to communicate with them in the way that makes their heart sing --through the fresh cut flowers she loves, or the scent of freshly brewed coffee that you get up early to make for him?

You may not highly value beautifully wrapped gifts--you're just as happy with the brown store bag, but you know he cares, so you crease the wrapping paper as he does for you. Don't you take time to pick out the present that will speak to your child, or dearest friend, so they will know, *without translation*, the caring you mean to convey?

The lesson of Pentecost is that God will go to any lengths to communicate to us in the language that we best understand. To some of us it will be through art. To others, through a simple story that rings true. For still others, God comes to you through an experience that lodges in your mind and doesn't recede – an instant when you knew, if only then – that a force beyond you was present, did care, would be there for you when you were in need. Some of us learn by doing, some by experiencing, some in deepest silence.

In fact, as Christians understand it, God realized that many of us humans learn best through another human – like the wise woman at the market - so God sent Jesus, who also trod this earth, and gained credibility with us, his fellow humans, a conveyer of God's message of Love.

God will do anything to reach you, in your language. Watch for it!

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In this beautiful place, King's Chapel, we have a special language, too, don't we? One built on lyrical words and tradition, intellectual thought and independence, openness of mind and excellent music. As a newcomer, I'm relishing this, and still learning, and you are helping me, as you would someone practicing a new tongue. You guide me when I mispronounce something, or accent the wrong *syl-lab-ble*. I want to learn, because you have wisdom to teach me.

What's exciting – and encouraging – from today's Pentecost story, is that we never need venture out into a new language alone, stumbling and bumbling into new territory by ourselves. The Holy Spirit empowers it. Remember, in the scripture lesson, it was not only *the listeners* who were startled, finding they could hear in their native languages. It was also *the twelve disciples* who must have been shocked -- these backwater Galileans -- who suddenly found themselves able to speak in languages they'd never known before! All by the power of the Spirit.

That's the powerful double message of Pentecost: both that we will get to hear God in language we can understand; *and* that God will use us to speak to others in languages we've not used before, that are more native to them, but foreign to us.

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What might that mean for us at King's Chapel? I am curious about those who dwell around us now, in 2013: during the week all of those in the large office buildings

nearby, and on the weekends, all those in the dorms, in the new apartments being built. I'm curious about the elders now living longer on Beacon Hill thanks to Beacon Hill Villages; about the younger generations coming back to an exciting downtown revitalization; the recently retirees, leaving suburbia for the city.

What is their language, that the Holy Spirit may be asking us to speak, in some way, to share the good news of God's love?

You see, according to Pentecost, none of us is immune to this task. Listen to what Peter says – he doesn't omit anyone!

God says,
I will pour out my Spirit *on all people*.
Your *sons* and *daughters* will prophesy,
your *young* men will see visions,
your *old* men will dream dreams.
Even on my *servants, both men and women*,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

Old, young, male, female, however erudite or lackluster we may feel – when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we can go beyond the limits we've imagined for ourselves. When the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us, *all* of us are capable of being God's agents, of communicating new visions to other!

At Pentecost, the results of the Holy Spirit were amazing. From an initial group of 12 disciples, and perhaps 150 followers. Wow – that would be great for King's Chapel, wouldn't it? New members!

Jesus summarized all this in the lesson we heard from the Gospel of John, read by Hallie. When the Holy spirit comes among us – when we realize that God lives right within us, always with us – then Jesus said, we his followers will do *even greater things* than Jesus did.

What? Us doing even greater things than Jesus could?

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Remember John Wyon, the public health expert who affected so many, worldwide? He ended his talk to us at church with just that phrase from the gospels: reminding us that Jesus had said we could do *even more than he*, with the power of the Spirit.

More than the vast healing attributed to Jesus, we asked? Yes, said John Wyon, Why not? We have so many new advances that have come through science and technology. Jesus, as one man, could never have reached the whole world, going just village by village, town by town. But we potentially *can* today.

We also have a larger network of his followers now, and many more medical techniques for healing. Let's get to it, John said! The power of God is with us!

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Isn't this true? Both parts of the astounding Pentecost message: First, that God yearns to communicate with you, in just the language, through just the ways that will reach you. Listen for him, for he is speaking your language, and seeks to tell you of the mighty deeds of God, in your very life!

Second, God comes to live right within you, as Holy Spirit, who in ways we may not now imagine, can give each of us the new language that will meet the needs of others, those hungry in soul who come to this place -- or *might* be willing to come to King's Chapel -- here in the heart of the city of Boston.

Listen with me for the powerful sound of Pentecost wind and flame at work in this place, coming to speak *to* you, coming to work *through* you.

Yes, Lord, take our minds and think through them. Take our hearts, and set them on fire! Amen.