

“The Gift of Understanding”

Acts 2:1-13

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Pentecost and Mothers’ Day

She was sick and could not go to Sunday School and church that day. She was really sad because it was Palm Sunday and she knew the children were to enter the sanctuary waving palm leaves. Her seven-year-old brother came running into the house after worship and said, “You picked the wrong day to be sick, Sis. We ran into the sanctuary waving palm leaves and Jesus came in riding on a real live donkey!” She was so upset and replied, “Oh my goodness, the one Sunday I missed Jesus showed up!”

This was a Pentecost you did not want to miss, either. God showed up in the most dramatic way and changed the disciples’ lives forever. Let me share the story with you.

Pentecost was important to the Jews who lived outside Palestine. Many did not attend the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem in early spring but waited to attend Pentecost fifty days later because the weather was better for traveling in May or early June. As a result, Jews from many regions and faraway places speaking a variety of languages made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to offer the first fruits of their spring harvest.

In many ways, Pentecost was like our Thanksgiving. It was a one-day celebration of the wheat harvest. Leviticus 23: 15-16 states, “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord.”

The people came to Jerusalem with grateful hearts to worship the Lord, including the followers of Jesus. It was while these disciples were gathered in a room somewhere near the temple that something remarkable occurred. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received power through the Holy Spirit. At this gathering during Pentecost, the Spirit came. Listen to Luke’s description.

“When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning, there was a sound like a strong, gale force wind. No one could tell where it came from and it filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. At this sound, the crowd gathered and was bewildered because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” Acts 2:1-8.

I am intrigued by the language barriers that fell that day. People that had never conversed were able to do so. Stories were shared, including those about Jesus. Strangers were turned into friends. Confusion was cleared up. Understanding paved the way for problems to be solved and challenges to be tackled. What a difference it made for people to talk to one another. Could there have been a more effective witness to the power of the gospel? I don’t think so.

Isn’t this what we need in our world today? Has there been a time when the failure to communicate has been so prevalent and devastating? I don’ think so and find that ironic. We live in the communication age and yet we understand each other less today than any time in my memory.

For this reason, I issue this Pentecost challenge this morning. Identify the people in your life with whom you are struggling to communicate and find ways to break those barriers down. It could be a friend, co-worker, classmate, sibling, child, parent or spouse. I am confident you know who your biggest challenge is and why. In all likelihood, you are less certain of what to do about it, though.

Let me offer this suggestion. **Ask for God’s help and rely upon Him to guide you.** This challenge is bigger than you are and He knows it. This is why He makes His power available to you so that you can accept this Pentecost challenge.

What will God help you do so that you can communicate with someone with whom it has been a struggle? He will help you to persevere when you want to give up. He will give you patience, will-power, determination and hope. He will renew your strength and resolve.

He will give you the courage and confidence you need to speak and listen with open hearts and minds. He will grant you wisdom and insight so that you may speak and listen clearly. He will provide mentors and role models that can give you wise counsel. He will give you a vision of what can be and a will to achieve it.

Why would God do this? I don't think anything is more important to God than creating community and bringing people together.

"Where is God?" Austrian Jewish theologian Martin Buber was asked. "He is between people," he replied. Helping people from all walks of life live in peace and harmony is God's passion and He knows that language barriers must be overcome for this to happen.

Fred Craddock reminds us that the Bible is a book of conversations. God said. Adam said. Eve said. Moses said. Abraham said. David said. Isaiah said. Jesus said. Peter said. Paul said and now, we say.

Conversations are important. They always have been. Covenants and communities are built upon them and the collapse of relationships can always be traced to the breakdown of communication.

Is this happening to some of your relationships? Where is the breakdown in communication occurring among your relationships? To whom do you need to be able to talk? Who do you need to understand better? Who do you wish understood you? You are not connecting. You are not on the same page and at times you feel like you are not even on the same planet.

What price are you paying? How are the people around you suffering because of your inability to talk?

This is Mothers' Day. Let's turn our attention to our home and family. Are you struggling to communicate with a child or grandchild? Have words become weapons instead of tools of understanding? Has communication ceased and completely broken down?

As a young person, do you think it is futile to talk to your parents? Deep down, you feel they don't care about what you think, but only want to tell you what they want you to know and do.

Do you and your mate end up in a shouting match every time you have a conversation? Do you feel your husband or wife is clueless when it comes to understanding your hopes, dreams, struggles, fears and anxieties? How long has this been going on? How weary are you? How many times have you given up?

What will happen if you keep drifting farther apart? What could happen if the barriers to communication were overcome? What difference would it make in your home or family if meaningful dialogue occurred? What message would it send to those around you? How would it make our world better?

I think it would make a big difference, just like it did at that Pentecost soon after Jesus' ascension. Why not accept today's Pentecost challenge and find out.

I appreciate George Buttrick's interpretation of this text. He believes that Pentecost could hardly have been the occasion when the disciples first felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Luke reveals that they let the Spirit guide them when they replaced Judas. However, according to Buttrick, this was the first time that the disciples became conscious of **the Spirit as power** and realized the role it could play in helping them to do the ministry to which they had been called. Connecting the Spirit with power transformed their lives. I believe it can transform ours, too.

Ask God to help you try again to communicate with a family member instead of giving up. Ask Him to reveal the changes you need to make in your own life so that you can speak and listen clearly. Ask Him to bridge the gap and heal some very important relationships in your life. I am confident He will because I sincerely believe that creating community and bringing people together is God's passion.

This I know for sure. Pentecost changed their world. It can change yours, too!