

**“Good Shepherd Lutheran Church”
Watertown, WI**

“The Miracle of Clear Communication”

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Pentecost, 2020

“And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? . . . We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God’” (Acts 2:7ff).

Have you ever considered how many problems there can be with the process of communication? So much can go wrong. These masks, though a very good idea, don’t help much with communication. Zoom and the like are wonderful tools, especially now, but also fraught with hazards. I was invited to the Zoom meeting of our first-grade class this last week. Was that ever a trip . . . multiple kids talking at once, changing their virtual backgrounds, turning themselves upside down or sideways, distorting their images. One liked to put her eye up close to the camera, so that’s all you saw of her. One of the boys did the same with his nostrils.

So many potential problems with communication. One of the frustrations I have is no matter how much you try to communicate, it’s never enough. People don’t check their emails or open the letter or read the bulletin insert or newsletter, and then you get scolded for not communicating.

Or maybe there’s background noise. At wedding receptions, once the music starts, I catch about every third or fourth word in a conversation and find myself smiling a lot and nodding in agreement to who knows what is being said or proposed.

So much can go wrong. Now, add to that the challenges if the sender and the receiver speak different languages. Add to that the challenge of a Christian witnessing the message of Jesus Christ to a non-Christian who has never heard of his crucifixion or resurrection. Add to that hearts that are, by nature, cold and hostile to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With all these things working against us, it’s a miracle that anyone believes in Jesus. And that’s precisely the point of Pentecost. Faith is a miracle worked by the Holy Spirit, through the message, but also in the one sending the message and in the one receiving it. Faith is a miracle of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, but also in the one proclaiming it and the one hearing it.

In our text the disciples are back in Jerusalem. They are still lying low after the resurrection of Jesus, not wanting to draw attention to themselves. Jerusalem is now observing the Festival of Weeks, also called Pentecost, which celebrates the completion of the spring harvest. That means Jerusalem is once again filled with pilgrims from all over: Mesopotamia, Judea, Asia, Egypt, Libya.

Suddenly, something remarkable happens . . . and mysterious. There’s a rushing wind and tongues of fire, and the followers of Jesus instantaneously find their voices and the courage to use them. Suddenly they can speak fluently in languages they never learned and are proclaiming the Gospel with crystal clarity. And, miracle of miracles, people are understanding the message and believing it.

Luke wants us to know that the whole world was there, with all its marvelous diversity; (racial, cultural, linguistic), and they would soon be going back home, which means God is now sending the Gospel out to all people. Disparate people are starting to coagulate into the communion of saints, the body of Christ. They have hardly anything else in common but the Christian faith and Holy Baptism . . . and that is quite enough.

All that happened because the Holy Spirit was working through the Word on both sides of the equation. Those proclaiming were gifted with foreign languages, but also with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those listening to the disciples were gifted with hearing the Gospel in their own native tongues, but also with hearts and minds that the Holy Spirit opened to hear the Gospel and understand and believe it.

Today, the Holy Spirit is still working through the Word on both sides of the equation. Many pastors, before they begin a sermon will silently pray the words of Psalm 19, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (v. 14). He's praying the Holy Spirit to shape and choose and edit his words in such a way that they are pleasing to God and good.

But the work of the Holy Spirit is also on the receiving side. In Romans 10, Paul writes, "Faith comes from hearing the message" (v. 17). And that's about more than just sound waves rattling the ear drums. It's about heart and mind making sense of it all and apprehending it for oneself. That cannot happen without the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 2, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (v. 14). And again, in 1 Cor. 12, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (v. 3). Therefore, among Luther's most important words are these: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel and enlightened me with His gifts" (*Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed.*)

Pentecost is about the miracle of the message of the Gospel being sent and received successfully. So, in the General Prayer of the Church we often pray, "Grant to your Church throughout the world purity of doctrine and faithful pastors to preach Your Word with power." (We pray for the senders. Then we pray for the receivers.) "Help all who hear the Word rightly to understand and truly to believe it." The Holy Spirit is working on both sides of the equation.

Because of human frailty and sin, a lot can go wrong with communications and often does, but when it all works . . . when the message of Jesus Christ is faithfully communicated, and received by faith, give thanks, because it's a little miracle. Wherever there is faith, it is evidence the Holy Spirit has been at work in the sender, in the receiver, and in the message! Thanks be to God. Amen.