

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Divine Dialogue”

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Acts 2:1-21

*2*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. *2*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. *3*Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. *4*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. *6*And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. *7*Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’ *8*And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? *9*Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, *10*Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, *11*Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ *12*All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ *13*But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

14 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. *15*Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. *16*No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17“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.

*18*Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

*19*And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

*20*The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

*21*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Last Friday night Laura, Amelia and I drove to my hometown of Stanton to have dinner with my father and the rest of my family. We had a great meal and a good time sharing some memories and laughter. The worst part of the trip was the drive home. It was now dark and we were sleepy from the trip and the events of the entire week. As I was driving, listening to the Tigers on the radio, I asked a question of both Laura and Amelia. No one answered. I checked beside me and Laura was

sound asleep. I checked the rearview mirror and Amelia was connected to her Ipod. There was to be no conversation.

Author and noted preacher Leonard Sweet writes about a transformation in the American family. Traveling down an interstate highway on a long car trip used to be good “family time.” Do you remember that? There was “The Alphabet Game,” where kids and adults could work their way from A to Z by getting the letters off the highway signs. Some families sang together, marking the miles with camp songs that contained a thousand verses. At the very least there were wars over who was going to sit where or what music would be on the radio. Someone would inevitably ask, “Are we there yet?” every ten miles or so. Then came the Walkman, Game Boy, the Ipod, and built in DVD players. Now a long distance trip with the family can be the quietest, most solo experience a parent can have. There is no sound and no conversation.

Today is the day of Pentecost, the day celebrated as the birthday of the church. On that day long ago, Jesus’ followers were gathered together awaiting the promised arrival of a helper or advocate, someone to help them and inspire them in Jesus’ physical absence. They were uncertain about their future and what to do next. They were quiet in their communication with God. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon them, as wind and fire. And the powerless disciples were suddenly filled with vision, with ambition, with energy, with excitement, and with power.

It is hard for us to get past the miraculous nature of Pentecost. I mean, it is kind of freaky! A strong wind. Tongues of fire. People speaking in different languages but being understood by all. It is beyond our comprehension, not to mention our level of comfort. This phenomenon called the Holy Spirit is hard for us to embrace. We tend to want to ignore it.

But the idea of the Holy Spirit comes around to we believers again and again. As followers of Jesus the Christ we can’t seem to get rid of it. Perhaps it is best not to try to explain it away or rationalize it. Perhaps it is simply best to witness to how the Holy Spirit works in us.

William Willimon writes, “The Holy Spirit is the supreme communicative mode of God.” Holy Spirit is “that act of divine self-communication...Holy Spirit is thus portrayed as that divine force, that heaven descended gift that enables us to hear God speaking to us and for us to speak to God.”

What happened that day of Pentecost was first a miracle of the ears. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, everyone could suddenly hear and understand God’s word. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God reaches down and speaks to us clearly today. In a way, that’s not too surprising. We spend a lot of time in worship listening for God’s word. We focus our thoughts and attention upon God. We listen to scripture and we listen to sermons and we listen to music.

Sometimes I am amazed at what people hear in church. I have been told that people have been moved by something they heard in my sermon, something that I didn’t even say. But someone heard it. They heard God speaking in some way. Such is the power of Spirit in improving our hearing. It is like the team from Verizon Wireless serving God’s intention for the faithful. The Holy Spirit puts us in a place where God’s direction is clearly heard and easily understood.

The second miracle of Pentecost may not be quite so obvious, but it also involves communication. It was the miracle of voice. What was the first thing the timid followers of Jesus did after being recharged by the gift of the Holy Spirit? They spoke. They preached. They testified as to the power of God in their lives. They began to speak to God in the same confidence that God had reached down and spoken to them.

This is the hard part of us, speaking to God. We may not know how. What do we have in common with our Creator? What words could we possibly say that would be fitting for God’s ears? When John Ruskin, nineteenth century British social reformer was told about the completion of a British-India communication cable, he was totally disinterested. He responded to the news saying, “What do I have to say to India?”

I recall the first time I called a girl and asked her to go out on a date. I remember the fear and trembling as I dialed the phone. I used the phone because I figured rejection would be easier to handle that way than in person. I knew that once the girl answered I would lose my ability to think and speak. So before making the call I wrote out an entire script to work from. Of course she said “yes” before I could finish all my lines. But I remember worrying about what I would say.

The miracle of Pentecost is that suddenly we have plenty to say to God and we suddenly know how to say it. Peter, in his sermon on that day recalled the prophet Joel's words, "your sons and daughters will proclaim my message." We will have something to say about God. And later the apostle Paul described the power of the Spirit as that which intercedes for us, finding the words that we want to say to God, speaking to God even in sighs that are too deep for words.

Pentecost is a day in which we celebrate divine dialogue. We give thanks that God speaks to us and that we have something to say to and about God. This dialogue is not over the phone, in letters, in email or in internet social communities. It is something more than intentional prayer. It is the give and take, the listening and speaking, and the mystery and discovery that is our faith journey. Our conversation with God, enabled by the Holy Spirit, comes in the hours and minutes of life, in the work and play, in the friends and strangers we encounter, and in the joys and concerns that fill our thoughts and our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit that brings explanation and doubt, reassurance and challenge, comfort and the need to change.