

SLIDE 1

The Miracle of Hearing John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-13 Pentecost, May 19th , WVPC

In the past couple of weeks, we've been talking about what Jesus says about the Holy Spirit, both before his death and resurrection, and also after his resurrection. Before his death, he talks about the Holy Spirit as the source of comfort, as the Spirit of Truth, and as the one who will remind them of everything Jesus has said, and help them to understand it. On the evening of Easter, Jesus breathes on the assembled disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Which indeed they do, on the occasion of Pentecost. Fifty days later – hence the name, Pente-cost. These are the Scripture passages that describe what we are celebrating about the Holy Spirit today. Hear now the word of God as it comes to us from the gospel of John and from the book of Acts.

SLIDES 2-15

John 20:19-23 - "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Acts 2:1-13 – When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ^[b] ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."//

Now, can I get everyone who can say or read the LP in a language other than English, to please stand up? Let's start, nice and loud!

Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου, ¹⁰ ἔλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου, γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ^[a] ἐπὶ γῆς· ¹¹ τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δός ἡμῖν σήμερον· ¹² καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ^[b] ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν· ¹³ καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ^[c] πονηροῦ.

Now, you who were listening: Could you sort out any of the different languages that you heard, when we were all speaking at the same time? (expected answer – no) Can you imagine now the cacophony of 15 different languages, at a minimum, all being spoken at the same time? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and Cyrene, Cretans and Arabs.

And in addition to 15 different languages being spoken all at once, there's a lot of just plain SOUND.

SLIDE 16

Verse 2 says, “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.” Anyone here who has lived through a hurricane or a tornado? Then you know that a violent wind is deafeningly loud! Or if you haven't experienced either of those things, then maybe you remember the bomb cyclones of a year and a half ago, where the wind was blowing so hard that it drove a stick into my car windshield and chipped it? That was loud!

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit caused inspired speech: the disciples were mostly Galileans; and they spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, and probably also some Greek, since that was the international language of the time. They did not speak Egyptian or Parthian or Mesopotamian. Being able to speak intelligibly in a language you don't know and probably never even heard before? That would be like if Donna back there suddenly started speaking perfect Japanese! That was a major miracle that has never happened since.

And then, when the crowd gathers to find out what's going on, Peter, the fisherman, preached a lengthy, well-argued, biblically supported, hard-hitting sermon **extemporaneously!** Let me tell you, brothers and sisters, that's definitely a miracle! The regular folks God calls to preach have to study and practice for years to learn how to preach a sermon that's accurate, theologically sound, coherent, and pastoral! And that doesn't even count all the hours of preparation that go into each sermon every week!

So yes, the Holy Spirit poured out the miracles of inspired speech. AND, the Holy Spirit also poured out the miracle of inspired hearing! Remember that story in Genesis 11 about the tower of Babel, where God came down and confused everyone's language, so that they couldn't understand one another, and they had to quit working on the tower because they couldn't work together any more? Well, Pentecost is the reverse of that. Pentecost is a miracle of hearing, of making sense out of the noise, as well as being a miracle of speech.

You couldn't make out what was being said, when (8) of us were all speaking different languages at the same time, right? Even though you knew the content what we were all saying, you couldn't understand the words? So if more than a hundred people are all talking at the same time, and they are speaking in at LEAST 15 different languages, how could the crowd around them have possibly understood what was being said - except by a miracle of the Holy Spirit? By the work of the Holy Spirit, everyone could hear and understand the wonders of God, in their own languages.

SLIDE 17

And, it was also the Holy Spirit who attracted the crowd's attention in the first place. In v. 6 it says, "When they (the Jews in Jerusalem) heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment..." OK, so what sound would that be? It was, remember, the "sound like the blowing of a violent wind" that's described in verse 2. So this deafeningly loud wind sound was something that everyone in the whole area could hear - not just the disciples in the upper room. That also was a hearing miracle of the Holy Spirit. The people in the area knew they weren't hearing a natural windstorm, because the air wasn't moving. Shutters weren't blowing off windows; veils weren't being blown off women's heads. They heard the sound of a loud windstorm without being blown around. That attracted their attention; they came to where the disciples were; and THEN they heard, and understood, the wonders of God being preached in their native languages, whatever those languages might have been, all at the same time! Pentecost is every bit as much of a miracle of hearing, as it is a miracle of speaking. Which makes sense. Speaking is nothing without hearing, right? //

Often our prayers are about asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us to speak. Like, asking for the right words to say to a difficult person, or the right words to smooth a difficult situation. Or we might ask for the courage to speak up about our faith - which is a real challenge in our area. Here in the South Bay, speaking about our faith is considered rude, and by far the largest percentage of religious affiliation in our area is...none. In Cupertino (as in San Jose generally), 57% of the people who live here have no religious affiliation. They are the nones, as in, none of the above. Think about that - when you meet a person, there's almost a 60% chance that that person has no religious connection at all. Of the roughly 40% remaining - those who do have some religious connection - about 3/5 of them are Catholic and about 2/5 are everybody else - Protestants, Mormons, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Muslims. OK. That's our environment here in Cupertino. That's also why we don't usually see Caitlin and Joel on Sunday morning. It's because they are in yoga classes! Yoga class - what? Why is that? Well, it's because the nones, by definition, aren't in church. Sunday morning is now the most popular gym time around here; so Caitlin and Joel go to the gym also, so they can get to know the nones and talk with them.)

So yes, we absolutely should be praying for the Holy Spirit to inspire the words we speak. When we are speaking to one another, we should speak kindly. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ; we should speak to one another as we'd like to be spoken to. If you'd like to be encouraged, then let the Holy Spirit inspire you to encourage others. If you'd like to be comforted, then let the Holy Spirit inspire you to comfort others. If we are all doing that, then the encouragement, and the comfort, will resound within the congregation, and lift each of us up as well.

When we are speaking to non-Christians, we should speak with gentleness and respect, remembering that we are in the minority. We should pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire whatever we say, that any grievances that a non-Christian might have could be countered by our cheerfulness and gentleness. And we should be praying that the Holy Spirit would be at work within them as well as within us, to remove whatever obstacles there are to faith in Jesus. That is what the disciples did, and that's what we are called to do as well. You just never know. When I was trying to decide whether to be baptized or not, the faith of some of my colleagues at work did help tip the balance.

And, we should ALSO be praying that the Holy Spirit would help us to hear. Hearing is just as much of a miracle as speaking is. If God is speaking to us but we aren't hearing him, well, what good is that? We have to be able to hear God before we can rejoice in him and follow him, right? So yes, we absolutely should be praying that God would help us to hear what he saying to us. We should pray that God will help us hear him through Scripture. Through worship. Through prayer. Through our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Holy Spirit makes God's word alive, and indeed more powerful and sharper than any double-edged sword, as Hebrews 4:12 puts it. Yes, we should be praying for the Holy Spirit miracle of hearing God's word.

And if we don't hear our fellow church members when they are speaking to us, then how can we be of any help to them? If our families and friends and the people around us are speaking to us, but we don't hear them, then how can we strengthen our connections with them? How can we be of any help to them? We can also pray that the Holy Spirit would grant us the miracle of hearing the people around us, so that we can be better connected to them. God grants miracles of hearing, just as he grants miracles of speaking. Today at Pentecost, let's pray for that.

Almighty God, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the prophets spoke and acted in faith; you gave them the power to bear your Word, that your people might hear it and respond to you. What are you saying to us now, your people, here in this place and at this time? Grant that we too might hear your word to us, and live it faithfully.

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit came as fire to Jesus' disciples, and you gave them voices before family and friends, and voices before the rulers of this world. Grant that we too would hear your word to us, and speak it to others.

Almighty God, send your Spirit into our lives with the power of a loud and mighty wind. Open our hearts to the flame of your wisdom. Open our ears, that we might hear what you would have us hear. Loosen our tongues, that we might say whatever you would have us say. We are here; open our souls, we pray, that we might convey your love and your power to a world that so desperately needs you. We are here, and we are yours. Do with us as you will. For it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

