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# Understanding The Significance Of Tongues

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What is this a picture of? (Picture of Large Red Straw Hat With Feathers)

Why am I showing it?

To get your attention...yes...but also to show you that this is what women used to wear on Pentecost back in the day...The feathers were supposed to signify the hovering of the Holy Spirit over your head

Kind of silly isn't it.

In fact, Annie Dillard who is a popular writer wrote about those hats that she saw coming into church back in the day...She wrote...**"That's madness. Instead of wearing straw hats with feathers on Pentecost, we should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares...for the waking God may come and do something in our lives that we may not be ready for..."**

That what happened at Pentecost, and what still happens in lives today.

We, as Christians are in touch with the living God, which as CS Lewis says in describing Aslan, **"Is not safe...but very good."**

We can't stay safe if we are followers of God

Last week we played the sound of rushing wind in here, just to give you a sense of the experience of that day when the awesome power of God descended on the disciples and shook everything up on the Feast of Pentecost

Last Sunday I explained to you that Pentecost was a feast of the first fruits of the Harvest; It was celebrated by Jews from all over and it came always 50 days after Passover; it was a time when farmers would come to Jerusalem and bring their sheaf of wheat as a sacrifice in gratitude and in petition that the rest of their harvest would come in

But this is a new Pentecost experience in Acts 2. Nothing like the sheaf of wheat...

This is the Pentecost of the Holy Spirit when this third person of the Trinity comes in power to harvest now (instead of wheat) souls for God's kingdom.

**The fruit to be harvested now is people, not wheat.**

Much the way Jesus told his followers – be fishers of men and women, not fish

So now, at Pentecost God is saying, the true celebration of the harvest is human hearts turned to Jesus... not the sheaf of wheat

*(And God comes and writes the law on human hearts (listen to last weeks podcast)*

What I want to talk about today is what the tongues portion is all about

There is so much controversy about this gift of the Holy Spirit called tongues, that manifests at Pentecost

The Assembly of God church – everyone speaks in tongues in the worship service

Some more straight laced churches say its all gibberish and shouldn't be allowed; that God doesn't work that way anymore

Do you know what? I disagree. God can do whatever God wants to do. I believe in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and in all of the gifts of Spirit; there are many gifts and I don't want to limit God. But I also believe that God works in people in different ways, and that the Holy Spirit is going to manifest different gifts in different people.

So I want to get all that out of the way so that we can now talk about what was happening in Jerusalem on that day, from a historical and theological perspective

To clarify and add some depth to your understanding of what all the different languages were about on that day

In order to do that we need to go back to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament

It seems like folks in Genesis 11 had a bit of technology

Not exactly iphones yet, but people had figured out by then that they could build things and create things and make bricks

Nothing wrong with that!

Okay this is great! The people say back in Genesis 11- ancient world

***Let us make a name for ourselves; so that we will not be scattered***

**At that time, the Bible says, everyone spoke the same language**

The reason to build the tower then, so we will not be scattered has anxiety embedded in it; the people had a kind of desire to control their own destiny for self-preservation

**God is never about our self-preservation – lose your life he tells us over and over, so you can fine it again**

But the people want to build a tower to make a name for themselves so they aren't scattered

They aren't sure what the future holds, and for self preservation they want to build a tower and stay together in their own bubble

Almost as some Biblical scholars have suggested in a kind of isolated community to stay safe

When actually God's command to the people was to fill the earth; to go out there and live for him losing our lives; and to trust *him*

The peoples fear of the future, and their need to build a tower (TOWER IMAGE) to stake out their claim, was very self centered, focused on them and that's not a God kind of project at all.

Also the comment of the tower reaching into the heavens (vs 4) also suggests that people felt they were God, and masters of their own destiny.  
Nothing new there...

***Actually, God wanted the people to fill the earth...that was his command. Not stay by their little tower and city and remain isolated and together.***

So God comes down, to look around, decides this is NO GOOD, and confuses the languages of the people who are building the tower  
And makes it impossible for them to understand each other; they can't finish the tower; a distance now comes between people; so the very thing they feared happens - they scatter...

**The word Babel means "confusion";** so when the writer says "Therefore it (the tower) was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth" that's what it means.

Ever been in a foreign country where you don't know the language and try to order food or buy a train ticket?

For me, the language barrier, that's the most frustrating thing to me about RSM  
I don't know Spanish

And I can smile, and wave to the kids and say "si" and "buenas dias" but there is a definite wall that I can't get beyond because I simply don't know the language

I am actually trying very hard this year to learn Spanish. I have the little Spanish CD going in my car whenever I commute north/south on 280. And I thought was doing really well with that, until I turned on Spanish radio, and I still couldn't understand a thing.

Maybe you too have experienced that disconnect with someone who speaks a different language than you

Lack of speaking the same language ends up creating a separation between people  
Even in our own families – even when we speak the same language – we may experience separation from each other just because so much hurt or misunderstanding has happened that we don't communicate together any more  
That separation is there..

We might be sitting across from our spouse at dinner and be thinking...  
*I long to know you, but I don't feel as connected to you as I once did*  
Or sitting with a friend at coffee, thinking, you know  
*I really wish this friendship had gone deeper but we never got there*

Now I want to show you the other side of the coin...when communication does happen what the response is...I want to show you the reaction of a little boy named Grayson Clamp who was born deaf. He knew sign language but had never heard sounds. There was a separation between him

and his parents because he had never heard his father's voice tell him "I love you." Look at his reaction when he hears his father's voice for the first time now that he cochlear implant.

**SHOW VIDEO** - <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2013/06/21/3-year-old-boy-born-deaf-hears-for-first-time-thanks-to-new-device.html?test=latestnews> Only the first 20 seconds.

I can't watch that without feeling a lump in my throat. The separation of not being able to communicate verbally has been overcome. And the father can say with words to his son "I LOVE YOU."

When the Holy Spirit comes, at Pentecost that same understanding, eye opening, message is proclaimed. Where

**The curse of Babel was confusion among the people  
No communication. Lack of understanding. Separation.**

**God comes down, in the person of the Holy Spirit and** opens up communication. People hear about God's love.

The Holy Spirit brings understanding to all the people; unifying this diverse population of folks from all different regions  
All of whom were gathered there in Jerusalem to celebrate this feast of the harvest

Interestingly, God doesn't eliminate the different languages and cause everyone to speak the same language as before

But rather he **God meets people in their diversity allowing each person to hear the gospel spoken in their own native language so they can understand and respond with joy and amazement...** maybe some of them looked as astounded as that little boy.

God undoes the curse of Babel at Pentecost; God undoes the curse of separation, and confusion among people's relationships to each other, and people's relationship to God

Now, there is no separation of people from God, because the law is a law of grace...not written on tablets of stone but on tablets of the human heart...

Now there is order, instead of confusion, because everyone is getting the same message proclaimed personally to them in their native tongue. That's grace. That's God's particular love for each person, meeting them in their uniqueness.

Remember, I said Acts has a lot of humor in it

The sneer of the folks coming together was "O they are acting this way babbling because they are drunk" or rather "They are filled with new wine." – to that criticism Peter's response is *"We aren't drunk! It's too early for that. It's only 9:00 in the morning!" is supposed to be funny*

No they are not drunk...they are certainly filled with something though – the Holy Spirit  
And as is always the case the Holy Spirit is taking them out of themselves...and connecting them to one another...as well as to God

Interesting that Peter's sermon, inspired by the Holy Spirit right after this, doesn't talk at all about making a name for themselves, like the builders of the tower of Babel wanted to do.

Rather **Peter talks about another name...the name of Jesus.** "Everyone of you, in the name of Jesus, be baptized." He tells the crowd. 3,000 are baptized

What a different moment it is – lifting up the name of Jesus rather than making a name for ourselves.

The Holy Spirit always points to Jesus

In addition, and very interesting, is the fact that indeed although the disciples and followers of Jesus were of one mind and heart having everything in common after this – they were eventually all scattered...just like at Babel... but this time they went with a mission

To fulfill Christ's command to get out there and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth  
They went out to proclaim the gospel boldly everywhere; to all people, to gentile and to Jew

It took them awhile to get it, that the Gentiles were included too in God's plan of salvation  
This whole morphing process from Judaism to Christianity is quite fascinating to study; devout Jews understanding the new Holy Spirit led life was completely a new concept...

I don't think God ever wanted, anyone to sit isolated and stay safe in a tower or city of their own making, with people like themselves – where we are all the same – and preserving the status quo

Both in the OT and New God says "get out there"

The OT says "fill the earth"...NT be my witnesses to the end of the earth

I don't care who they are, or where they come from, its time to share the good news with everyone

Not stay in a safe little community, but be out there where you have to take risks, and learn to trust me

Again...**God is not safe, but he is very good.**

If Acts 2 means anything, it means that all people are included in God's plan of salvation, and we are to get out there too

Filled with the Holy Spirit, and share the good news

Friends we have a melting pot in our community

Culturally we are incredibly diverse in Cupertino

We do not have to take an airplane to a mission field

The mission field has come to us folks at this time in our history

Think of all the money you are saving not having to travel!

How are we to respond to this mission field in our backyard as the church?

How do we share the gospel with those from different cultures and traditions.!!!

In order to respond to this need, and to begin to couch the gospel in a way that people can receive it

We are encouraging small groups to study a book called "Once I was lost";(IMAGE) small group leaders training after church next week that will go into this...

This book does a great job teaching us how to share our faith effectively with others, in ways that work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to do it, filled with the Holy Spirit

Cause its hard sometimes to know how to share our faith like those first apostles did; what to say; what not to say; how to bring up the subject of Jesus...

This book does a really good job of teaching us how to do that

I hope that you will think about studying it together;

However you experience the Holy Spirit in your life; whether it's a rushing wind or a still small voice I have noticed something that is common about the leading of the Holy Spirit...He always seems to move us beyond our comfort box and our routine

We can...

Come to church, fit church in to our schedule, go to brunch afterward

Think we are doing well with that cause most people don't go to church at all...but the Holy Spirit calls us beyond ourselves, beyond what we think reasonable in our schedule, to something more

I don't know what that is for you...but just listen to him  
 Maybe during this Holy Week while you have a chance to go to some extra services, walk the labyrinth that I wrote about in the devotional, spend some time at the prayer vigil, take some time to think about what perhaps he is calling you towards

Strange thing about our society, unlike in the past

We really can edit people out of our lives... and we really can live in a bubble of our own making...  
 So easily we can click "Unfollow", or defriend, edit out people not like us (**show clicker on that**)  
 Drive into our garage in the evening in our car and the door comes down  
 I wake up, I can get in my car in the morning – drive out – not see anyone  
 Listen to the radio/go to work/ and then to a respectable restaurant for lunch where people look like me  
 Go home. See my husband, walk my dog, text my kids  
 I rarely break out of that routine...and in so doing I edit out most of the world around me

That's when status quo becomes kind of an inertia

What if I were to say yes to that still small voice calling me to modify my routine a little bit to let others in - what might happen?  
 Maybe I'd have to put my crash helmet on like Annie Dillard said...but how exciting that would be

Do you know what I am going to do as your Pastor because I have felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit to do this for awhile?

I am going to spend part of Wednesdays, not in my office, but walking the neighborhood right by our church. Cause, I want to meet those people, talk to them, I want to build friendships, and if the opportunity arises, invite them here.

It would be much easier to stay in my office behind the desk. That's pretty safe...that status quo...  
 That's known

But I can't preach Pentecost to you...and talk about how the Holy Spirit came in power and scattered the disciples to the ends of the earth, to teach them to trust and risk and spread the gospel, unless I get out there and do it too.

I want to learn how to speak the language of this diverse community and how that can translate into sharing the gospel.

So that's my commitment to you to do that. What is the Holy Spirit nudging you to do? Let's be willing to put on our crash helmets...Let's pray