

Speaking Up

Pentecost, Year C – Acts 2:1-11

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson May 19, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Okay, so just a reminder that rather than being the first Sunday of a *new* season, Pentecost Sunday is actually the last Sunday of the *Easter* Season. So, one more time, Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

By the time we get to the point in the story of the Gospel and the Church that is recorded in this morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples had really come a *long* way. At the beginning of their involvement in the story, many of them were uneducated, uncouth commercial fishermen. Some of them had been following around the camel-skin-wearing, locust munching, self-proclaimed prophet John. One was a tax collector, the same sort of despised bureaucrat we love to hate today. And one was even a *Zealot*, a named member of what we in twenty-first century America would call a terrorist cell. These eleven near-strangers from the backwater province of Galilee had only one thing in common: Jesus had looked them in the eye and had said, "Follow me."

For three years, they followed the rabbi from Nazareth that had called them each to turn away from life they had been leading to an examination and expansion of their minds and hearts. They were there for miracles and signs and wonders. They had heard sermons and parables and private explanations. They had endured storms and insults and persecution by the authorities. Their world had been expanded *waaay* beyond the dusty roads and fishing villages of Galilee to include the whole of Palestine, from the Samaritan countryside to the teeming streets of Jerusalem and even to the courts of the great Temple itself.

Yet through it all, they were so readily identifiable as members of the same little Galilean clique that on the night of Jesus's arrest and trial, you'll remember, a little girl tending the fire in Pilot's courtyard was able to pick out Peter based on his accent. Three days later, their confidence and resolve shaken to its very core by the execution and burial of the one they had come to love and respect and honor, after two betrayals and ten cowardly defections, what was left of their group cowered behind locked doors in the back streets of Jerusalem for fear the authorities would finally catch up with *them*. It was there that their lives were most profoundly touched, as the master they had buried appeared in his resurrected glory to teach them even more about God's love and about God's Kingdom.

The disciples may have come a long way in the last three years, and especially in the last fifty days, but they were still basically the same band of backwater hicks that they had always been. They may have a tremendous story to tell, but who was likely to listen when it came out with a dripping Galilean drawl. So except for the occasional fishing trip and that mountaintop experience of their master's final comfort and blessing as he ascended back to heaven, the Disciples stayed in their little borrowed room.

All that changed on Pentecost. There they were in that same upper room, talking and praying and singing in the same comfortable words that they had always used, when all of a sudden, whoosh, bang, boom – something *new* happened! The Holy Spirit that had been promised by Jesus came upon them – and in a *big* way. As if tongues of fire burned over each head, the disciples were filled with knowledge and with love and with power. They jumped up from the dark room where they were huddled, flung wide the doors and began to speak. What's more, these backwater Galilean hicks began to speak in Parthian, whatever that sounds like, and Elamite and Mesopotamian and Capadocian and Arabic and even Latin. Everyone in the crowd that gathered was able to hear the message in their *own* language. They were each able to hear the message in a way that they could understand, in a way that actually *meant* something to them. And the Church, the story continues, went from a frightened handful to thousands – in a single day.

When we get past the idea that we can continue indefinitely as a cozy, closed community of saints, the frozen chosen of Henderson, Kentucky, we sometimes talk about how to speak outside these red doors to the world around us. But if we expect to have the same kind of results as the disciples, if we expect to reach out to those who have yet to hear the saving Good News of Jesus Christ, we need to find ways to speak that find them where they are, ways to speak peace to their chaos, and fulfillment to their longing, ways to speak Christ's redeeming love to their minds *and* to their hearts. If we expect to reach out afresh to those home who have already heard the Good News, perhaps right here, but have let other voices drown it from their hearts, we need to find ways to speak acceptance to their alienation and healing to their pain. If

we expect to fulfill the mission we have been given by Christ, if we expect to do the work we have been given to do, we need to speak to the world around us in language that *means* something – to *them*.

I don't mean that we have to speak in "tongues." The way I read the story, the disciples weren't speaking in some sort of spirit language, but were able to communicate to the people that were before them in words that each of them was able to understand. With Paul, we need to strive to speak clearly to the hearts *and* to the minds of those with whom we would share the message of Christ.

I don't mean that we have to use specific words or phrases. I grew up distributing pamphlets of the "Four Spiritual Laws" and being taught that if we could just get someone to say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is my personal Lord and Savior," that we had been successful witnesses for Christ. Witnessing to God's power in our lives is much more than clichés and platitudes, it demands language that speaks from one heart to another.

I *certainly* don't mean that we select certain ones to do our speaking for us. While it is Peter that gets most quoted later in the story, notice that the story says that "*all of them* were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak." It is not enough to designate a handful to teach, to assume that those we elect as leaders will do our speaking for us, to say, "well, *the Rector* is the one paid to witness for us." We are *all* called to witness to the change that has been made in our lives, to the way the love and the grace and the mercy of Jesus Christ have touched us and made each of us, and *all* of us, whole.

What we need to work for, what we need to strive for, what we need to *pray* for is the means to speak the changing power of Christ's love in a language that will reach the hearts of those who need to hear it. And you know, dear friends, I am convinced that that language has very little to do with words at all. I am convinced that the way we are likely to reach those of our community that do not know the saving love of Christ, the way we are likely to reach those who have lost track of that love, is in the day-by-day, moment-by-moment *living* of the lives given to us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. Lives touched by an understanding of the richness God's blessings to us. Lives aglow with the transforming power of Christ's grace and his mercy. Lives filled to *overflowing* with the realization of our Father's awesome love for us.

When we begin to pray, both individually and corporately, that in addition to blessing us, God will *use* us, then and only then will we come to understand that we *have* all the words we need, that we *have* all the power we need, that we *have* all the authority we need... that we already *have* the tongues of fire we need to speak to our neighbors, to speak to this community, to speak to the *world* about the wondrous work Christ has done in our hearts, in our lives, and in this Parish Family, the work our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can do in *every* life.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Come, Holy Spirit, come.