

The Day of Pentecost [c]
Genesis 11:1-9 Romans 8:14-17 John 14:8-17
St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH
June 5, 2022 [Traditional]

You know, any time we pick up a Bible which modern-day people can read, we're picking up a translation. From the very beginning, Christians have been translators of the Word of God. Today we're celebrating Pentecost, the birthday of the church. In Acts' chapter 2, the Holy Spirit comes upon those first Christians and what's the first thing they do? They begin *speaking in different languages* so that everyone in the hall could understand the Word of God in their own tongue. This is the first thing the newborn Church of Jesus Christ does: it starts translating.

So you could say, translation is basic to who we are as Christians. At every bible study here at St. John's, we're doing it. Every sermon you hear is an act of translation. We are translating the story of God in Jesus Christ into our everyday language, into our time and into our situation right here, and the divine story—the Word—is becoming part of us and shaping us. So God's story in Christ is not just a book on my shelf. It is MY story. *I* have been put to death in my baptism into Jesus. *I* have been raised by the power of Christ. I live by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's the Holy Spirit at work, translating words on a page into power and life for *you and me*. The Holy Spirit makes what happened on a Sunday 2000 years ago happen now for you and me. The Spirit draws us in and connects us to that event.

As a follower of Jesus, it's amazing...I can go to the depths of central Africa, or to the most remote Pacific island, and I might not understand a word of what the people there are saying. But if I meet a Christian there, that is family. That is my brother; that is my sister. The Holy Spirit unites us in a bond that's stronger than any geographical, political or racial distinction. We are blood siblings through the blood of Jesus. We drink from the same cup. We are brothers and sisters who love and worship the same Father, who answer to the same king.

In the first lesson from Genesis, the world is shown under the power of sin (it's shown as it is): broken and divided. People are separated from each other by different languages, geographic and racial and political barriers. Of course you don't have to look that far at all: in our own neighborhoods—sometimes in our own families—people are divided by hatreds and feuds and fears and jealousies. Well, at Pentecost, the sad story of brokenness and separation starts getting reversed. At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon those followers of Jesus, the final age of the world began, when everything started coming back together in the name of Jesus Christ. This old universe, separated from God, is expanding out into nothingness, and will finally come to an end. But now through Jesus Christ, the Spirit is reuniting us with our Creator; he is gathering us back in and bringing us to the future that he has prepared for us. This is what the church has been doing, person to person, for twenty centuries. Into our own neighborhoods, and out to the farthest corners of the world, we've been heading out, translating, proclaiming the word of God, bringing each new generation together in the Word, uniting them as a family

under a loving God who will give his life to set them free and keep them free under his loving lordship.

One close-to-home example: Just think of what our Sunday School teachers are doing here at St. John's. The work of the Holy Spirit. Translating the word of God into the different languages which preschoolers, kindergartners, school age kids and adults are using to understand and interpret their experiences. When teachers share the word with the fire of faith in their hearts and with love, the fire spreads. Our children are not just getting bits of helpful information so they can make good moral choices. They're receiving power to go out into the world. Power to proclaim Christ. Power to live as victorious Christians, full of faith and hope and love. As a Christian, I don't want my kids just playing defense out there in the world, in the middle all those destructive powers. I want them to go out there *in the Spirit* as victorious conquerors, with the Word of God. I want my kids to know that with Jesus, the gates of hell can not prevail against them. When the world tries to tell my children which false gods they have to bow down to, I don't want them just to refuse to bow. I want them to talk back. I want them to speak back to the world, and tell the world who its real king is. We should understand that the "little things" we do here in our congregation can have as powerful an effect—they can start something as big—as what happened in Acts chapter two.

In Biblical Greek, the word for Spirit is *pneuma*, or breath. As in, God breathing his own life into Adam. As in, Jesus breathing his life into his disciples. In German the Holy Spirit is the *Heilige Geist*. *Geist* as in GUSTO. It's not a ghost that haunts an attic. He's the power that animates the living body. He's using yours. He will use our bodies. The Holy Spirit gives Christians the life, the gusto, the energy to be open, unashamed, fearless and joyful about their faith in Christ. He uses our hands and feet, our brains, our vocal cords, to do His work. He works his ways through people. He is invisible, but the effects he has on people are visible. Through the proclamation of Christ, lives are changed. People move from despair to hope. Lost sheep find forgiveness, and a place to come home to. New relationships of love and healing come into existence. People who would have no other connection with each other come together as a family and worship the true Lord of the universe. That's the Holy Spirit at work.

A lot of things we do as God's church might seem small. For example, when we send gifts of food and clothing and school supplies in the name of Jesus to people in need on the holidays, send letters of encouragement to servicemen and women, work in a soup kitchen in Columbus, or when our youth go and repair homes for people in the name of Christ, when we deliver beds for kids who don't have them..we are not just doing nice things there. We're sending a message out into the world. There's death and hopelessness out there. But they cannot stand against what *we* are putting out there. Whenever one of us visits someone in the hospital or shares someone's burden, we're not just doing something nice. The message is going out: we believe in a Lord who shares our burdens, a Lord who defeats death, a Lord who says that the last word is resurrection.

During Easter, we focus on Jesus' victory over everything that keeps us apart from God, over everything that keeps us down and kills us. Easter tells us, there can be no doubt

now as to how the war is going to end. The victory march has begun. Now, on Pentecost, the camera angle changes just a little bit. God is saying "don't watch the parade from the side of the street. Now get in the parade and start throwing out the prizes!"