

PENTECOST, YEAR A, MAY 28, 2023

There is an old story about a Persian cat who was the mother of 3 kittens. The momma cat taught them everything a good mother should. She taught them how to feed themselves, groom themselves and play with yarn. One day they were out taking a walk when a large German shepherd appeared. He looked ferocious, to the tiny kittens as he sauntered up to the mother cat and started to growl menacingly. The kittens cowered behind their mother but she did not flinch. Just as the German Shepherd was inches from her and her babies she let out a series of vicious barks and a guttural growl that was as loud and fierce as the dog. Shocked and shaken by this strange cat the German Shepherd turned and ran down the street. The kittens emerged from behind their mother and were excited and amazed by what they had witnessed. Looking them straight in the eyes, the mother cat said, That my dear children is why everyone should learn a second language.

Today is an important day in the life of the church; the day of Pentecost. The story of Pentecost begins with the disciples huddled together when there was a rush of wind and tongues of fire appeared on their heads and they were filled by the Holy Spirit and incredible changes happened to them. The most notable is that they were able to communicate with the thousands of people assembled in this diverse city in their own language. We often overlook this aspect of the story – the ability to communicate the message of Jesus in all the native tongues of the people gathered.

Anyone who is bilingual or is well versed in several languages understand that a language is more than its grammar, vocabulary and syntax. Languages carry the full weight of their respective cultures, histories, psychologies, and spiritualities. To speak another language is to put oneself in a different world that sees, hears and processes differently. To attempt another language is to be a learner and have the desire to broaden one's horizon in every aspect. And sometimes it also means understanding our own language with all its varieties of idiosyncrasies and being careful how we use our words. We all know language has power. Words can make worlds and can unmake them, too.

When the disciples and their friends began to speak in foreign languages, the crowds gathered outside their meeting place understood them. But the people were bewildered when they heard their own native language being spoken. They were not confused by the message itself rather what the crowds found baffling was that God would stoop to speak to them in their own mother-tongues. They couldn't believe God would welcome them so intimately, with words and expressions that took them back to their birthplaces, their childhoods, their beloved cities, countries, and cultures of origin. It was astounding as if to say, "This new Body of Christ, is yours. You don't have to feel like outsiders here; we speak your language, too. Come in. Come in and feel at home."

Something happens when we speak each other's languages. We experience the limits of our own words and perspectives. We learn curiosity. We discover that God's "great deeds" are far too nuanced for a single tongue, or a single fluency.

At the first Pentecost a community of spirit was created and it broke through divisions and separations. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day was powerful, passionate and potent stuff! The disciples received the gift of inspiration that spurred them to action with all their other gifts. The Spirit is the foundation for their work, the

source of their confidence in their abilities. After all, being filled with the Holy Spirit is being filled up with God's own self. Pentecost celebrates the fact that the Holy Spirit is the language of God and a gift that is available to each one of us.

How we become the people of God is by celebrating and acknowledging the language of the Holy Spirit that God has given to us. This spirit that enhances all the other gifts and attributes that make us truly who we are. Gifts are things like joy or hope or compassion. Our gifts define us as humans and are gifts of God's grace alive in us. As a community it is up to us to affirm one another in the gifts that we see, to draw out in each other that spiritual gift that is uniquely ours.

What gifts does the language of the Holy Spirit stir in you? Do you have gifts of music, singing, dancing, reading, cooking, baking, painting, cleaning, organizing, teaching, giving, comforting, visiting, listening, strength and love. As many of us are gathered here today is how many unique combinations of gifts from God we have here today. There is no one whom God has not gifted – first with gifts of grace and unconditional love, and second with specific gifts that make us who we are. Even little Wesley has been given the gift of grace and unconditional love and we await with anticipation what his other gifts will be. But the best gifts are ones put to use and are loved, cherished and appreciated.

Pentecost reminds us that we are to use the gifts that God has so freely bestowed upon us in order to transform our lives and beyond ourselves. But I think we often wonder how our gifts could transform the world or we don't think our gifts have much or any effect.

Have you ever heard of the Butterfly effect? The Butterfly effect states that even the slightest, most imperceptible influence upon a system can bring about great change and fluctuation in that system. The example the author of this theory uses says that even the movement of the air caused by the flapping of a butterfly's wings can bring a change to weather patterns on the other side of the globe. As hard as that is to believe they have designed experiments and simulations that have shown this to be true. The point being, the littlest change sets about a whole chain reaction of events that create greater and greater changes the further away you get from this core event. When you think about this premise, you begin to see how true it really is as a matter of faith. It is why I think we can call Pentecost Butterfly's Breath as a way of suggesting how the Spirit works within the church. Think about Pentecost as the mighty wind of the church which is really the result of the breaths of many being faithful to the language of the Holy Spirit which seeks to lead us and inspire us to action.

Pentecost invites us to look beyond our circle, to listen to new voices, see new possibilities, to remember that in God's world, the way things are today, are not necessarily the way they are meant to be.

Pentecost reminds us that we need to be amazed. That our faith should be accompanied by the cacophony of diverse voices, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the mighty acts of God.

Pentecost is a time for the unexpected to happen in church and not rely on the same old same old that we've come to expect from church. We come to church to renew ourselves, to awaken ourselves to all that God is doing in our lives, to open ourselves to the gifts of the Spirit so we can be moved to action.

The Spirit that was set free on Pentecost is our model. It is an inclusive spirit—for the rich and the poor, the social outcast and those in the inner circle; it is a spirit that inspires and empowers each one of us with the power and the passion of the Holy Spirit of love. So, on this Day of Pentecost and the day we welcome Wesley Kenneth McCarthy into God's one holy church, let us ask the Spirit to help us show Wesley a church whose members believe in God's healing love in the lives of hurting people. Let us show him a church that speaks and acts with a faith that will help to reconcile the world to itself and a church that is also willing to turn the world upside down.

Let us be a church of spirit-filled people, unafraid of loving, living, laughing, crying, dancing and singing as a response to God's amazing grace in our midst.

Let us be a church whose witness in the world struggles to be on the side of the marginalized and whose purpose in the world will help transform it.

Let us be a church for Wesley unafraid to be filled with the Holy Spirit of Love, unafraid to speak to the mighty power of God in our lives and the world—a church filled with dreams and visions and gratitude for the call to be sons and daughters of God.

Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and Wesley's with your life giving love. Ignite our hearts, inflame our souls, and kindle our spirits that we may burn anew with your love. Amen.