



Acts 2:1-21 - When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia 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!”

¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.” ¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

You have a God who speaks to you



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Language has fascinated the minds of thoughtful people since language has existed. It's how we communicate with each other, how we grasp abstract concepts, how we learn, and if I may go so far, it's crucial for a healthy existence. Throughout the centuries, everyone from Egyptian Pharaohs to popes in Rome, from research scientists to psychological scholars have made attempts to discover the origin of language. Why do we speak the things we do? How do you understand what I'm saying right now and I, in turn, grasp what you're telling me? Whether these people throughout history were trying to discover what the "original language" of Adam and Eve was in the Garden of Eden, or whether children would somehow invent their own language without first seeing it modeled by someone else, they carried out their work with the unstated foundation that language and communication are vital. But what happens when language and communication are removed?

You don't have to flip too long through the pages of history and you can find a number of experiments that attempted to answer that question. But what started out as scholarly inquiry often ended in tragedy. In one experiment, twenty newborn infants lived in a special, isolated facility. Caregivers would provide for all their physical needs – feedings, diaper changes, baths, but the caregivers were told not to touch or handle the children any more than necessary. And even more, they were told never to speak to them. I think the stated intent of the experiment was to determine how children could develop communication skills without hearing it from an adult. But what happens when no one is speaking to you during those developmental months? What happens when the silence is deafening and nobody's talking? With no one speaking to them, showing them affection, or communicating with them, none of those children developed normally and many of them died. It absolutely breaks your heart to think of the stone faced silence from people who should have known better.

I wonder if that's how people in the world today think about God. If he even exists, it sure seems like he's awfully quiet about a lot of stuff. What about the starving nations of the world? What about terrors of crime against the innocent? What about the absolute rejection of absolute truth? What about the decay of morality in our country? What about the belittling, back-biting, and bickering going on in the church that bears his name? What about the unbeliever who's groping around in existential darkness looking desperately for someone or something? Shouldn't God speak up? Shouldn't he make himself known? Or is he turning a deaf ear to prayer? Is he sitting in heaven in stone faced silence toward a world gone wrong?

Marvel with me today - into such a cynical, critical world, God unleashed the power and the miracle of Pentecost. You heard about it in our lesson from Acts 2, **Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.** Now, fifty days after his resurrection, was fulfilled Jesus' repeated promise to send another Counselor, the Holy Spirit. Now was fulfilled the prophecy of Joel pointing ahead



to this event when God would unleash the power of his Holy Spirit on his people. Now was answered the age-old criticism about a silent God. God is anything but silent - You have a God who speaks to you. But what does he say? When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in all those languages of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphillians, and more, what were they saying? Let's listen to the crowd's assessment of their words, **"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages!"** That was the message of the first Pentecost, and that's still the message of our Pentecost celebration today: You have a God who speaks to you. He reveals his wonders to you – who he is, what he's done, and who you are because of them both. But how does he do it?

People who claim to receive direct revelation from God or say, "I heard God tell me..." are often met with a healthy dose of skepticism, and rightly so. How could I ever really know if what you're saying is true? That's a valid question – if we have a God who speaks to us, how does he do it? The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear, **In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.** To hear the voice of God, you don't have to climb the highest mountain and meditate. To hear the voice of the God who speaks to you, you can't look deep inside yourself to find all the answers (spoiler alert – you're not going to find any that satisfy). In order to hear the voice of God who speaks to you, go to where he's promised always to be heard loud and clear – in his Word and the Sacraments.

Isn't that exactly where Peter pointed in his Pentecost preaching? Read through the rest of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 when you get home today and notice where he directs the focus. If he wanted to be a religious huckster, he could've claimed he had some special power from God to enable these disciples to speak different languages. He could've made all sorts of wacky demands of the people who were listening to him or try to gain a following for himself. He could've offered (for a price) the secret to how they, too, could access this miracle of God in their lives. But he didn't. Instead, in the wake of this unprecedented outpouring of God's Holy Spirit and unbelievable miracle they all witnessed, what did he do? He pointed them to the word of God. He walked the people through the prophecies made about Jesus and how Jesus fulfilled each one of them. Then he pointed the people directly to the waters of baptism. You have a God who speaks to you through his Word and Sacraments. That's where he reveals himself as a gracious God – not because of how much good we could do, but because of how perfect Christ is for us. You have a God who speaks to you through his Word and Sacraments – that's where he shows his loving face, his fatherly care, and that's where he communicates his ultimate purpose for your life – to bring you to be with him forever in heaven.

We have a God who speaks to us, but sometimes we don't particularly feel like listening. Maybe it's when a stinging word of God's law aims directly at my specific brand of sin. Maybe it's when I don't feel like showing the love of Christ to someone I deem isn't worthy of it. Or maybe I feel like I've heard it all before and I've got more important things to do. In a few minutes, we're going to hear two young people profess their faith – much like each one of us confirmed members have – and answer questions like this: *Do you intend to continue steadfast in this teaching and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it? Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and Sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God as long as you live?*



Every time I witness a confirmation or think back on my own, I have to self-assess: How seriously am I taking those promises I made at an altar like this one so many years ago? How about you? *Endure all things...even death rather than fall away from God's truth?!* At one point in time, it seems we're willing to admit that this God who speaks to us in this way is, in fact, the most important thing in our lives. But time passes, enthusiasm fades, and what happens when we don't hear the language and communication of our God? Like those poor children who had speech withheld from them, when we remove ourselves from the saving message of Christ and his gospel, we're lost.

But this is the beautiful promise of Pentecost – you have a God who is still committed to speaking to you through his Word and Sacraments, even when your commitment to him has fallen flat in the past. Every time you gather with your brothers and sisters here, it's not a social function – it's where the law of God shatters our sinful hearts and the gospel restores us. Every time you walk by that simple structure called a baptismal font, you get to remember what happened there and listen all over again to the loud and proud proclamation and promise God boldly resounded on that day, *"You are my beloved child, in you I am well pleased."* Each time you stand shoulder to shoulder with your fellow sinner-saints at this altar you do so to hear the voice of your crucified and risen Lord Jesus speaking just to you, *"My body, my blood...for you. Your sins are forgiven."*

So, dear confirmands, dear confirmed members of Hope as well as those to be confirmed in the future – keep on listening to the God who speaks to you in his Word and Sacraments. God send his Spirit to bless you in the promises you make today and in the promises to which you recommit yourselves today – trusting in the God whose promises to you never fail. God bless you always to hear the saving voice of your Savior in the gospel – it is your life, it is your light, it is your salvation.

Amen

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21)