"**What does this Mean**?"

I suspect all of us here today have heard of the Jewish festival of Passover - the most important religious ritual in the Jewish faith, similar in significance to our Christian celebration of Good Friday and Easter. Passover commemorates the Jewish Exodus from Egypt -the freeing of the Jewish people from Pharaoh's grip – freeing the Jewish descendants of Abraham after 400 years of slavery. Passover is a commemoration meal – remembering the story – each part of the meal – the bitter herbs, three pieces of unleavened bread, parsley, a roasted egg, four cups of wine, and the all-important afikomen, the bread of redemption – each part symbolizes something of the story of that first Passover. And at each part of the Passover meal it starts with the youngest child present asking the father – "what does this mean?" - four times - as a sign of "wanting to know the story of what God has done." "what is God telling us about what has happened to our people?" And then the father explains the story. When God acts on behalf of His people, it's good to ask, "What does this mean?"

At Pentecost as described by Luke in Acts 2:1-13, the were great crowds in Jerusalem. Jewish people from all over the Mediterranean Basin were there for a feast of First Fruits – a harvest celebration like our Thanksgiving. But, Luke describes two groups, two groups of "they".

The first "they" of verse 1, is the 120 people gathered in a house, probably near the Temple in Jerusalem. They were men and women together with the 12 disciples, waiting according to the instruction given by Jesus before His Ascension (Acts 1:4). "Wait in Jerusalem for the gift my Father promised" They were constantly in prayer, probably in eager excitement of that promise to come. We should note that these 120 people were Galileans, the area around the Sea of Galilee in Israel's north country. That's where Jesus had spent much of His ministry.

In Acts 4:13 two members of this group, Peter and John were ordered by the Sanhedrin – the sort of Israel's Supreme Court – not to preach in Jesus' name. The Sanhedrin had noticed the courage, the boldness of these two men and the fact that they were unschooled, ordinary men, the Sanhedrin was astonished. You see, the Galileans were mocked as Israel's hillbillies, uneducated country hicks. But note carefully, the hoity-toity Sanhedrin "took note that these men had been with Jesus" A very significant detail. "They had been with Jesus".

The second group of people, the second "they", was the crowd of God-fearing Jews in and around the Temple for these festivities of Pentecost which involved feasting, eating and drinking the new wine. This crowd of God-fearing Jews had come from many countries around the Mediterranean Sea, from as far west as Libya and Rome, and as far east as the borders with today's Pakistan. These folk were Jewish by race and had Jewish heritage but were more Greek than Jew. Some had been in these foreign countries for generations

because of the Diaspora – that scattering of Jews by oppressive rulers in Israel years before. But these folk would come to Jerusalem on high and holy days, like Pentecost or Passover, or Hannukah, like Muslims would come to Mecca once a year.

Well, the group of the 120 were together in one place, probably praying and suddenly the place was filled with the sound of a violent wind – Luke uses the word which described the roaring of a storm-tossed sea – and filled the house…and miraculously there appeared what seemed tongues of fire – perhaps a sort of St. Elmo's Fire – appearing over each of these Galileans who had been with Jesus. And they began to speak in languages they had never learned before, and these Holy Spirit anointed ones went out to the crowds and began to speak of the wonders of God in a familiar tongue to the foreign visitors. The crowds were amazed, hearing and understanding what was being said, and they asked "Are these not Galileans (there it is again - country hicks)? How is it that we hear and understand them speaking about the wonders of God in our language?" What is going on? What is God saying, or telling us? "What does this mean?"

The miracle of Pentecost is not what sounds like the gobbledegook, called glossolalia, which can be heard at modern day Pentecost events, but clear languages with grammar and syntax – the anointed ones were speaking about the wonders of God. There was no need for translators, no one needed to give an interpretation of strange sounds. What the crowd needed a rabbi, a bible teacher, someone familiar with the wonders of God. Someone who knew their Bible. And Peter was that rabbi – the unschooled, fisherman from Galilee. "I'll tell you what it means."

Listen: the miracle of Pentecost is that it is a Shekinah event. A shekinah event in Israel's history is an event where and when God would come and live among His people, literally descend and dwell in and among the Israelites. Shekinah describes God's glory coming down in such a way that could be seen and heard by His people. It was understood as God's way of giving His blessing, His Amen. God lives with His people….as Jesus came and "tabernacled" among us says John 1:14. And we have seen His glory.

There are three occasions that can be mentioned as Shekinah events. One is mentioned in Exodus 40:34 when the Old Testament tabernacle was completed and dedicated by Moses and Aaron. The glory of God descended in a pillar of fire and smoke. God blessed His home among His people. A second is mentioned in I Kings 8:10-11 when Solomon's Temple as finished and dedicated and the glory of the Lord descended and filled the whole Temple so much so, the priests could not finish their sacrifices. It was the Lord giving His Amen to dwelling among His people in His new House. The Temple is where God meets His people and where they meet Him.

And now the third occasion, Christ's work of redemption is completed, the 120 have dedicated it with prayer and the wind and fire descended- not on the nearby Temple that Herod had built,- it was, shall we say, passed over – the Shekinah of God came on His

people, who had been with Jesus, the people who had been with Jesus – the Galileans, the unschooled ordinary people.

Those who had been with Jesus, are the new Temple, the anointed Temple where God meets and lives among His people. Peter writes in I Peter 2; believers are living stones being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, a people who speak out for God, to tell others of the night and day difference God makes in your life, from despair to hope, from emptiness to fullness.

This is what God is saying at Pentecost – "I'm anointing the New Temple, and it's not made of bricks and mortar, fancy architecture. I'll be found among my ordinary people. Wherever two or three are gathered, there you'll find me". That's where His Spirit dwells and does the wonderful work of freeing our tongues to speak of what we have received.

That's what Rabbi Peter, the Big Fisherman from Galilee, explains to the crowd. This was the dream of Joel, to see the day when there would be signs in the heavens again when the Spirit would descend on everyone, young men would see visions and old men would dream dreams, men and women. The Spirit would inhabit His people and they will prophesy – their tongues would be set free to speak. You know how tongue-tied you can become when you have to tell someone about being a Christian, you get awkward, red in the face, clear your throat frequently, say hum, hum too much. The Spirit frees you to speak about your Lord like you would about your first car, or your favourite hockey player, or your Minecraft program.

That's how God is made known to others – it's people speaking to people. Did you notice that the day of Pentecost ends with what looks like an afterthought – verse 41 – 3000 people were added to the number of believers that day. They heard what Peter had to say, and there would be others explaining it further – I envision, and I know it's a tricky thing to do – plough back into a biblical story an example in today's world – I envision something like what would happen at a Billy Graham crusade, people would come forward and there would be counsellors there speaking and praying with these who wanted to say "Yes" to Jesus. These "counsellors", the ordinary people who have been with Jesus can tell of what it's like to follow Him. Ordinary people can change another's world. You don't need Billy Grahams. The Spirit in you will do the work.

Ordinary people can change another's world by beginning with three sacred phrases. This is the contention of Rob Wilson in his book "Thank you, I'm sorry, Tell me more" We live in this internet connected world, we can't escape interacting with others, at school, at work, at home. And what makes for hospitable environments for people is if they personally connect well with others. Every day people impact us, whether at home, at work, driving your car, riding the Ion. We impact others, we influence others. And the

more we pretend we don't, the more we become strangers, sometimes fearful strangers, because we're different. And if we used these 3 sacred phrases, we discover the stranger is just an ordinary person, living, working, worshipping, doing life with you.

If we say "thank you" – we're acknowledging the way others impact us.
If we say "I'm sorry" – we're acknowledging the way we impact them.
If we say "tell me more" - we acknowledge the way we impact each other.

When we say "thank you" we bring an attitude of gratitude in a culture that breeds "I'm entitled". If we say "I'm sorry" we create an attitude of remorse, admission of responsibility in a culture where people play the victim card. If we say, "tell me more" we bring an attitude of care in a culture where "it's everyone for themselves".

If we live and work with others, they could experience from us gratitude, remorse and care. Then gratitude would move to be the prevailing mindset, gratitude sets the heart and mind on seeing others as image bearers of God, ordinary folk like us. Entitlement, selfishness would move to the edges. To express remorse is to validate others in how we have wronged them and in apologizing, redeems them, keeps the door open. Tell me more, is an invitation, a bridge to communication, to valuing others' ideas, experiences and story.

These three phrases are like the punt boats used in biblical times. A travelling ship heavily loaded with cargo wouldn't be able to get close to the harbour to anchor. A punt boat, a shallow, flat-bottomed small boat, like a rowboat, would carry the anchor of the larger ship to the harbour, and then the larger ship would be able to winch itself to the dock. Our words, our disposition of gratitude, humility to admit failure, our invitation to conversation can give permission for another to come closer – and meet Jesus in you.

The church sorely needs to use these three phrases. What threatens the church is not the inclusion of people of other races, tongues, colours, or gender attraction. What threatens the church is the failure of believers to speak of the wonders of God, with hearts of gratitude, humility and failure to invite others to tell their story of their longings. If we cannot tell others of what God has done, we need a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit. In Christian Smith's book "when religion went obsolete", the point is made that the digital revolution eats away at communal gatherings – people don't talk, they text; people don't do face to face; they livestream…..community breaks down. We begin to live in silos.

The phrases are punts to create communication, friendship, opening hearts and freeing tongues safely. When a listener hears a grateful voice, a willingness to admit mistakes, and an invitation to "tell me more" there can be a bridge to a trusting friend. They can detect in you a glimmer of the Shekinah of God. They can see and hear that you have been with Jesus. And they then can respond with "tell me more".

What does the Pentecost event mean? Well, now's your chance to tell me, each other.