

Pentecost Sunday, Year C

A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger

on June 8, 2025

Acts 2:1-21 / Romans 8:14-17 / Psalm 104:25-35, 37 / John 14:8-17, 25-27

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
and lighten with celestial fire;
thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed!

Has anyone ever noticed what the rubric before the Lord's Prayer is in the service booklet? Turn to p13 of the yellow service booklet.

As at the Day of Pentecost, use any form or language with which you most feel comfortable.

It's hard to say a different version if you're the minority in the group. For me, now that I can say the Lord's Prayer in Spanish without stumbling over the words, I try to say the Padre Nuestro at Diocesan events. I can only do that if I am next to another person who saying the Padre Nuestro and they are speaking loud enough for me to tune into them and shut out the English speakers.

Has anyone had an experience like described in Acts? Multilingual worship? A very close simulation of this is at the Lambeth Conference, when all of the Bishops in the Anglican Communion get together once a decade or so. With Bishops, spouses, staff, volunteers and visitors at the Eucharist for the opening, the closing and the Sundays during the conference, there are about 2,500 people gathered. The liturgy is in the language of whichever Province is leading it. The sermon is in English. But the Lord's Prayer is in whatever each of the 2,500 souls' native tongue is. If you step back to observe and listen, all you hear is an amazing and beautiful cacophony of sound. There's not a common rhythm. And for about 15s at the end, handfuls of voices are all that is left, dropping off a few at a time as the length of that language's Lord's Prayer finishes. Then it's silent. And then the sacramental bread is broken! And the presence of the Spirit has filled the room! And all understood one another as each spoke their own language.

If you go to the Lambeth Conference 2022 Closing Service on YouTube at 1:10:14, you can kind of get a sense of the holy cacophony underneath the two bishops who are mic'ed.

But the Pentecost story is more than a feel-good moment in history. I regularly remind you that our faith and worship is not a nostalgic looking back on biblical events. Our faith and worship is a living testimony to do God's deeds of power.

In his Ascension Day sermon last week, Trevor reminded us:

We now have each other to look at. It was their job to continue [Jesus'] work, to show Christ through their own faces, and to meet Christ in the faces of other people. ... The Ascension marks the transition from Jesus' ministry to our own ministry.

It is now our job to continue Jesus' work, to show Christ through our own faces, and to meet Christ in the faces of others. Today as we celebrate Pentecost, we are reminded that we have been given the Holy Spirit at our Baptism to do this work.

And the story of Pentecost reminds us that our own faces and the faces of others come from every tribe and language and people and nation. The story of Pentecost is yet another example of God's *Radical Inclusivity* and our own call to *Radical Inclusivity* as we seek out Christ in the faces of others. And in today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the assurance that we *can* do this:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.

One of the most notable dynamics between the Gospels and the Book of Acts is the change in attitude, demeanor and zeal of the Apostles. In the Gospels, the Apostles repeatedly make mistakes. They don't understand anything that Jesus is teaching them. They even sometimes tell Jesus that He shouldn't be doing what He's doing because it's out of step with polite society ... perhaps what Jesus was doing made them feel uncomfortable.

But in the Acts of the Apostles, these same people are on fire for the Lord! They are now very clear on Jesus' message and, with great zeal, share it with everyone. They organize themselves for the most effective ministry possible. They seek the qualities in individuals that will meet all the needs of their community, turning away no one, rather, recognizing different gifts fulfill different essential functions. They were transformed by the Holy Spirit to do this work.

The purpose of the Gift of the Holy Spirit wasn't only to empower us for ministry. The Gift of the Holy Spirit was to change your life so that you can do that ministry. Each person at that Day of Pentecost had a significant transformation that focused them on and equipped them to do Christ's work in the world: the *greater works than these*.

Pentecost Sunday is our reminder that we, too, need the Holy Spirit to transform our lives so that we may do those greater works than these. We need transformation to live the Radical Inclusivity that the Apostles lived after that Pentecost moment.

Most of us believe ourselves to be welcoming and inclusive to anyone. I've heard many a visitor and many a newcomer tell me how welcoming St Stephen's was to them when they came. That is awesome!

Radical Inclusivity is about welcoming and including the people who are not represented in significant numbers into our worship space and the life of the parish. It's about being genuinely welcoming to 'the other' who doesn't really fit in.

Perhaps – as part of becoming a Radically Inclusive community – we should work on the stuff that makes us uncomfortable or that we're confused about. What is that stuff? What stuff about other people makes you feel awkward and uncomfortable?

- *Pronouns? What's with the pronouns, and why don't they align with what I know?*
- *Foreign accents? I find it hard to understand what they're saying even though they are speaking English.*
- *Affordability? When people who have jobs complain about not being able to afford daily life in SLO, I'm like "It's California!"*
- *Talking about race? All this talk about race just makes me feel guilty and bad about myself as a white person.*

Those are 4 really big issues in the lives of the people who live and work around you. If conversations about those make you feel awkward and uncomfortable, then the next step toward Radical Inclusivity is to educate yourself around these issues and be open to being transformed. And then continue to engage in conversations about them, conversations where you do most of the listening and learning. And then, eventually, this stuff won't be uncomfortable anymore, and you will be on the road to Radical Inclusivity. Not all transformations by the Holy Spirit are quick or easy. Any transformation requires one to work on oneself and challenge oneself.

Why do we need to have the conversations about these issues? Can't we just be nice and get along? These issues are real issues for people we claim to love or claim that we would of course welcome into our community. But if we suppress these issues that are real and affect the lives of people around us, the message to them is clear: *We don't actually care. We will welcome you as long as you assimilate.*

I think it was the Rev Canon Stephanie Spellers in her book *The Church Cracked Open* that she said that congregations are welcoming of all types of people as long as they eventually assimilate. That stuck with me – both as a person going into new congregations, and as a priest welcoming new people into congregations. When the Vestry reviews the ministry of *Invite-Welcome-Connect* this summer, we would do well to keep the notion of assimilation at the forefront of our conversations.

Assimilation is the opposite of what the Pentecost story tells us about the mission of the Church. Assimilation is the opposite of what the ministry of Jesus tells us about the mission of the Church:

- *The Syrophenician Woman*
- *The Hemorrhaging Woman*
- *The Good Samaritan*
- *The Centurion and His Daughter*
- *And very notably: The 3 Wise Men*

All people in Jesus' ministry whom He cared for, who were different from the typical person in His life, and from whom He did not require assimilation: they were allowed to be who they were, to present their full authentic selves.

Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit so we could do this challenging work in our own communities. We're not trying to change the world; we're trying to change *ourselves* so that others may know Christ through us. I often hear that others will know we are Christians by our love and our actions. And while I believe that to be an excuse to never mention Jesus' name outside these walls, we still have a lot of

work to do for others to know we are Christians by our love. But Jesus promised us that He would send the Holy Spirit to help us do this challenging work:

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

The Holy Spirit is here! But we still have to do the work!

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each ... All were amazed!

Feeling the Holy Spirit fill the room as The Lord's Prayer is said in all the world's languages at the Lambeth Conference is a result of not only our worship, but the ability for every person in the room to present their authentic selves to God in that worship. We will feel the Holy Spirit and know the power of the Holy Spirit when we are a place where we welcome in any and all of God's people to worship and have fellowship with us as their authentic selves.

Can we, the St Stephen's Family, be as open and inclusive as those gathered on the Day of Pentecost? *We did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.* This Pentecost Sunday and every Pentecost Sunday is our reminder that we were given the Holy Spirit at our Baptism to do this work. Every piece of music in today's service is a reminder that we were given the Holy Spirit to do this work. We have been given the Holy Spirit to speak of God's deeds of power and to do them, so let's do something with it!