

Pastor Joe Polzin
Acts 2:1-21
“The Greatest Communicator”
Year A – The Day of Pentecost
June 4, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

On June 12th, 1987, U.S. president Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin. It was a critical moment, when, at the height of the Cold War, he began to address the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to open the incredibly symbolic barrier dividing the East from the West. Reagan said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

Whether people agreed with Reagan’s politics or not, many called him the “Great Communicator” for his way of speaking in moments like these. In his farewell address at the end of his presidency, he humbly said, “I never thought it was my style or the words I used that made a difference – it was the content. I wasn’t a great communicator, but I communicated great things, and they didn’t spring full blown from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation.”¹ And that’s so very true – that great communication first and foremost needs great content, the substance of the message.

Today, we celebrate Pentecost, a day nearly 2,000 years ago when a great message was communicated. In His sending of the Holy Spirit, God truly was the Greatest Communicator. But not only because of the style or the words that were used, but also because of the content of the message. And the content of the message from Pentecost was Jesus Christ, and he provided the foundation for something brand new that God was beginning, the era of His Church.

Now, Pentecost was one of the three major pilgrimage festivals for the Jewish people, drawing people from all over the known world to Jerusalem. It was a celebration of the spring harvest, and it took place 50 days after Passover. That’s what Pentecost means, “the fiftieth day.” And if you’ll recall, Jesus’ suffering and death took place right at Passover. So, the events from Acts 2 took place 50 days after Jesus’s death and resurrection, and 10 days after he had ascended into heaven.

Acts 2 begins, “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.” The followers of Christ had all stayed in Jerusalem, just as Jesus had told them to do. And Acts tells us there were only 120 of them at this point. And the fact that they were all together in one place suggests that they may have been gathering to worship God, celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

And while they were meeting, there was a sound from heaven “like a mighty rushing wind.” And something that looked like fire appeared and rested on them, and the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised he would send, was poured out upon them. And they began to speak in tongues.

But, they weren’t the only ones that heard that heavenly sound. Remember, the city is packed with people from all over the world, and this sound was loud enough that a great crowd came to where the followers of Jesus were. But as they drew close, they began to hear another sound, something even more amazing. They began to hear a bunch of Galileans speaking in his or her own language.

Now, we don’t know the mechanics of this, whether the apostles were suddenly speaking languages they hadn’t previously known, or, if when the apostles spoke the words in their own

¹ “Reagan: The great communicator.” BBC News, 5 June, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/265509.stm>

language, it landed on the ears of the foreigners already translated. The point is this, that the miraculous communication going on was happening because God, the Greatest Communicator, had enabled them to communicate in foreign tongues. But not simply to enable them to communicate, as if that's the most important thing, but more importantly, so that they could communicate the message God had given them, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is how miracles are meant to be received in the Bible. It's never *only* about the miracle. The miracle opens up a door for the Word to be heard, and it points us back to learn about God. People missed this all the time with Jesus, when all they wanted was a miracle from him, but they failed to recognize the one who *did* the miracle. The same is true here. Yes, it was amazing the apostles could speak in foreign languages, but that was only the *means*. The purpose of the miracle was so that they could communicate their message. And in Acts 2:11, we see what it was they were communicating; the people from the crowd said, "We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

The "mighty works of God." This was a phrase that is used in the Bible to refer to the mighty ways God saves His people, saving the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, or bringing them back from exile to the Promised Land. Now, they were telling of a continuation that rich history of salvation by telling about Jesus who was crucified for their sins, raised from the dead, and who ascended into heaven. And the things of which they spoke sounded so fantastic, so incredible, that many assumed they were drunk at nine in the morning.

God was beginning this new age of His Church with the greatest combination of communication and content that the world had ever seen. The promised Holy Spirit had now come, and had enabled the apostles to speak, but not in unintelligible words, or some sort of "heavenly babble." The content of the message about Jesus Christ came through loud and clear for all who were present to hear in their own language.

And the key for us today is to understand that this message is still true and valid for us, and the communication from God to us is still ongoing. The problem is, so many in our world today may not even believe in God, much less that He is particularly relevant to their lives or has anything to say to them. Many believe that He's just "out there" somewhere, but it's up to us to make the most of this life on our own.

And even we Christians, who know God and follow Him closely, can still have days where we wonder, "Where is God in all this. What is He trying to say to me?" This is especially true when we face the challenges of life, the days that are more low than high, or the times when we feel real spiritual attack.

It's in those moments especially, when we are assured that God *does* have a message for us. That He is communicating just as clearly as He did on that Pentecost day. Peter stood up, and although we only hear the first half of his sermon this week, and the second half next Sunday, we know what the message was he shared. And it begins with the content, the substance, of his sermon. That the center of his proclamation is Jesus Christ crucified and raised to life for us, and that's been the proclamation of the Church ever since.

This message of Jesus Christ may not answer every question we would prefer to have answered, but it does answer the most vital one, the one that will sustain us through all of the temporarily unanswered questions – "Am I saved?" Peter uses the words of the prophet Joel, who was looking forward to the day when God would pour out His Spirit upon all people, the day of Pentecost. And because of the working of the Holy Spirit within us, we know these words from Joel are true – "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the

Lord shall be saved.” Upon hearing this, 3,000 people that day called upon God’s name, were baptized, and formed the beginning of the Christian Church.

God spoke definitively to you through His Son, Jesus Christ, who died to take your sins away, and rose again so that even though you may die, you can be assured that you will rise again to eternal life. And God is still speaking to you today. He has provided many ways to connect with you so that you might hear this message proclaimed. He has sent His Holy Spirit so that when the Word of God is read or heard, we hear, in our own language, the love that God has for us. His Spirit accompanies us as we approach his table and receive the body and blood of Jesus, receiving his grace and forgiveness. And His Spirit is at work in the waters of Baptism, when we were washed cleaned and connected with Christ’s death and resurrection in an eternally significant way.

Since the Day of Pentecost, until today, God, the Greatest Communicator, has not only been communicating to the world and to us, but also He has been delivering a message to us of greatest importance. Jesus Christ is delivered to us, and through him, we hear that we are forgiven, saved, and claimed as His own. The good news of Jesus is a message that will never fade away. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.