

Pentecost June 4, 2017 Acts 2: 1-21, Gospel: John 7 :37-39

FINDING A COMMON LANGUAGE

It began with a loud noise like the sound of jets that pass over our heads stilling our conversations; a violent wind arose like those summer storm clouds that send you scurrying for cover; but before protection could be found there were flames as of fire that moved amongst them, touching them even with their heat and energy. This was not an artificially created extravaganza at a hip hop concert, but rather it was a collective spiritual experience, maybe like the experience Moses had when he disappeared into the clouds on Mount Sinai.

Jesus' Easter journey had come to an end, his appearances had stopped as he returned to where he had first come, back into the heart of God. But now this is God's next move, suddenly releasing the God's Spirit into the world, initially moving out amongst those 120 Jews who were in Jerusalem celebrating the Harvest Festival known as Sukuot, Jews who had immigrated from the surrounding countryside in Palestine, each with their own language. This experience came upon them suddenly reminding them of their prophet Joel's prediction of the apocalypse, the sudden arrival of the day of the Lord.

No wonder they were filled with fear, awe and bewilderment. This spiritual experience was not some gently spiritual opening to a fluttering dove-like spirit waiting in the air, creating a contemplative peaceful moment. No, there was power here, energy, swirling purpose filling them with a sense of urgency, causing them to open up their mouths, their ears, their minds, freeing their tongues to speak in their own languages – a cacophony of sounds. To the outsiders, it seemed like they had become suddenly drunk maybe on some local wine that had gone bad, like a rave high on ecstasy. The miracle though was that even in the midst of all of this chaos of sounds and heat, their hearts were given a sense of understanding, a heart with a shared purpose.

We are only beginning to really understand and appreciate the plethora of languages spoken in our own nation, a nation of many nations. We have a deeper appreciation that indeed we need to be more than just a bilingual nation, but to be authentic to our own origins, we need to be a place where many more languages are reclaimed, known and spoken – Algonquin, Mohawk, Inuktitut, Cree, Ojibwa, Dene.... As a city full of Embassies, we are more aware than other cities of the diversity of people that live here and hopefully during Doors Open Ottawa and the 150 celebrations all year long you will have the opportunity to visit many of these Embassies.

Even our United Church crest which now has the languages of Latin, English, French and Mohawk written around the edges, expressing our shared value of unity and community through Christ, to truly reflect our own denomination, we should also honour the many other voices and languages that are spoken in our churches – Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Armenian, Italian... to name a few.

Although English and French are the shared language of business, we are challenged to nurture a common language of the heart and mind which shares values of respect, openness, compassion, mercy, love generosity and forgiveness. To even have those conversations about what our values are is a hugely import role that churches play. First United took a good step in that direction of expressing that important value of hospitality and welcome in the production of those signs that you see adorning so many lawns that are written in English, French and Arabic – We don't care where you came from but you are our neighbour. There is such a diversity of languages in our own neighbourhood that I think it would be wonderful to have so many more signs made up to include these languages and to discover from each other what is our gospel, what are the values that make people tick, which keep them grounded and energized.

I am heartened by the invitation of Algonquin Elder Alf Dumont to the various religious leaders and their members in Ottawa to join arm in arm to walk together from Victoria Island to Parliament Hill on June 23 in an act of solidarity to show respect for

people's sacred places, their places of worship. He is passionate about reclaiming the Chaudiere Falls, his watery sanctuary, to their rightful place as a gathering place for many nations, as a sacred place of healing and renewal as it had been for hundreds if not thousands of years. I plan to be part of that walk, especially as there are so few opportunities for people of different faiths to physically walk and talk together about what is important to them.

Those of you who are blessed to travel in these coming summer months have so many wonderful opportunities to encounter people of other languages, cultures and faiths, to learn and to share. Even in the Doors Open event when I was here yesterday, I met people from around the world, people who live and work in Angola where we are partnered with the Congregational churches; an Australian woman who is working with several united churches in Adelaide who are needing to learn how to cooperate and share their resources. I could share our experience with Square Food Ministry and our relationship with Odawa. They too have a similar project they are working on as the church called a Congress with the Indigenous people. Some important conversations from halfway around the world are beginning to brew.

It is in our DNA as the United Church to be a uniting church, to gather people from all walks of life, much more than just the Methodists and Presbyterians (the Brits and the Scots), but to encourage people from all walks of life who are thirsty to know God, who want to be part of caring communities, who care about the injustices in the world. We have a long history attempting to live out the social gospel, promoting free education for all people, health care for all people no matter what their income level, sharing the national wealth with everyone through a system called 'welfare', caring about the environment, sharing concern about climate change....

We know these stories, or we should and so many of these goals have been achieved, have become part of the fabric of our society, even though some are in danger of being eroded, for example as people are influenced by the decision of Trump to pull

their country out of the Paris Climate Accord. We know that there are new anxieties in our world, new fears, wondering about the future of our church, the need to evolve as a nation that honours and respects indigenous rights and gifts. And so we listen again to the Spirit blowing through us, opening our ears to hear new languages, old and nearly lost languages, to hear new thoughts, to be open to new ideas that are energy.

God's love which was embodied in the Jesus Christ, stills needs to be made alive in this day, and so we listen for there the Spirit is sweeping us off of our feet. Where is our awe, bewilderment and amazement as we sense the movement of the Spirit? Where are the places and ways that our fear can be released into positive, life-affirming actions?

In the midst of the business and bustle that is our world, our lives, we take the time now to pray, to listen, to wait for the Spirit of God to reveal and renew our purpose, and yes, to fill us with the energy and love we will need to lead by the Spirit's call.

let us pray. O God our creator, the earth has many languages, but your gospel proclaims your love to all nations in one heavenly tongue. Make us messengers of this good news. Give us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that when we speak to our children and to those we love, and when we speak to our neighbors and to all the world, we will have something to say that brings hope and faith. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Time of contemplative prayer