

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Has this happened to you? For those of you who have travelled internationally - you were in a foreign country and your ears had become accustomed to hearing the language of the locals. But one day, you are out sightseeing and hear someone speaking your native tongue, most likely English. Didn't you just home in on that voice and want to go over and talk to that person?

Last summer we were in Copenhagen at a small bakery ordering coffee and one of their tasty pastries. A young man overheard us talking in English and immediately struck up a conversation with us. He was from California and was now working in Denmark, but had not yet mastered the Danish language. He sat down and talked with us. Both Linda and I realized he wanted to talk to someone who knew his native language.

You don't have to travel internationally to have such an experience. Living in Southern California, there are plenty of opportunities to be in a situation where your ears hear a language foreign to you. Maybe it was in a market or a restaurant where Spanish, Korean, Chinese or, my recent experience, Czechoslovakian was spoken. You wanted to make a purchase or ask a question, but didn't know how to speak the language when someone who spoke English walked up to you to ask if they could assist. You probably breathed a sigh of relief.

I imagine that those gathered in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost felt much as you or I would feel when we were surrounded by those who spoke a foreign language. In today's scripture, we learn the city was full of people who spoke a variety of foreign languages. And I imagine when any of those folks heard someone speaking their language, they wanted to pay attention to that person, and probably go meet them!

The day of Pentecost was 50 days after Passover. Penta meaning 5 and Pentecost meaning 50. The day was a celebration of the time the Jews were given the Torah on Mt. Sinai. Torah has several meaning, but most of the time Torah refers to the first five books of the Old Testament. As Jeffery pointed out at our First Wednesday Worship, this day, Pentecost, is also called Shavuot.

Who were the people that I read about? They were folks from 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. All these countries represented most of the known world at that time. They were Jewish, devout Jews who could take time to travel to Jerusalem for this celebration.

They were outsiders to the close knit group of the followers of Jesus who were all located in Jerusalem at this time. God chose this particular time for the arrival of the Holy Spirit to send Jesus' life-saving message to everyone in the world.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit wasn't just for the disciples. It was for the outsiders also. Yes, the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection was for everyone. The Holy Spirit's arrival connected people from all over the world with the message of Jesus Christ's life story. And that message and the Holy Spirit are still connecting people today.

The message heard that day sounded ridiculous to some, so that "others sneer" as it says in verse 13. There's no difference today. When some people hear the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, they 'sneer,' they reject the message just as some did on that Pentecost day.

As Christ-followers, the way the Spirit operates can be disturbing. As you Bible scholars know, some people in Jesus' day wanted to keep Jesus exclusively for those who were Jews. They didn't want to let non-Jews in on Jesus' life-giving love. Even today, there are people who call themselves Christians but don't want people of a different color or those who speak a different language or who have a different sexual orientation, don't want 'those people' to be a part of their fellowship. Like some early Christ-followers, they want to keep Christ for themselves and not share Jesus' message of love and inclusion.

On this first Pentecost we see that God intends for 'others' to be a part of God's family. Today, we know the Holy Spirit is for all of those in God's family.

Let's consider further our understanding of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the lives of others.

Perhaps you've heard the old story of the vicar who visited a primary school where they were learning the Creed. The children lined up for the vicar and one by one recited a section. However, an embarrassing silence enveloped proceedings part-way through. Eventually, one child blurted out an explanation. "I'm sorry, the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit isn't here

today." I pray that each of us do believe in the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is here in this church today – and in your lives.

We may not always like what the Holy Spirit reveals to us, but the Holy Spirit is real. Acts portrays the spirit as a wind that can blow here and there, not where we'd like it. The Spirit blows in unexpected places and hopefully bring us along with it. Thankfully, we are often able to look back and recognize the Spirit's driving wind; that it was the Spirit after all and not just a chaotic, frightening storm.

You may remember that John the Baptist promised that Jesus, the Coming one, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. I don't know about you, but I've always heard John the Baptist's comment as a warning and perhaps, a threat. Did John's comments mean that the Spirit's outpouring on the world would mean wrath and condemnation? If it did, then all we Christ-followers would have to do is sit back and wait for the rest of the world to go to hell.

But we learn from today's scripture that God's gift of the Holy Spirit was not a rejection of the world, but a sign that God intends to reach out to all the world and reclaim it.

The arrival of the Spirit on Pentecost was not a one-time event. The spirit didn't make a dramatic appearance at Pentecost and then go away. All through the stories of the early church recorded in the Book of Acts, the story of the early church and how it spread, we have story after story of the Holy Spirit's involvement. Recently, we've talked on Sunday morning about the Holy Spirit coming on the family of the Roman Centurion and, as a result, Peter baptized the whole family. We also discussed Paul's dream of a man from Macedonia who begged Paul to come to his country.

On the day before Laurie Holk died, she told me that she had been talking with God. She was at peace that she was going to die. She said she wasn't ready to go, but God wanted her in heaven. So, she was following God's wishes. That was the Spirit talking to Laurie. You can just imagine Laurie's dry humor when she told me this. Yes, the Holy Spirit is alive and well working in your life and my life right now.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is alive and well today. Working in all Christ-follower's lives. We simply need to believe the Spirit is here.

Writing from a hospital bed, Robin Johnson says: "Presently I am in the hospital. I have been here eight days. Throughout these eight days I have been in contact with one angel. When you have a close relationship with God you can recognize God at work in your life and in the lives of others. Nurse Kathy turned around my attitude and my physical recovery by her care."

Johnson's point is that when you're guided by the Holy Spirit, God will use you, perhaps a guide, or what Robin calls an angel, to help others. (Robin Johnson, in e-mail correspondence with Homiletics).

Yes, the Holy Spirit is alive and well today. And it's inside each of you and working through others. Let me share this simple story about the Holy Spirit as I close.

One June evening, just past dusk, a little boy was playing outside his home when he noticed some fireflies. He was fascinated by their brightness, and so he ran inside the house and excitedly asked his dad, "Daddy, what makes the fireflies glow?"

His dad, not sure how to answer, said to his son, "I really don't know, son. Why don't you ask your teacher at school?"

The boy was not discouraged by his father's non-answer but simply ran outside to admire the fascinating creatures some more. He tried to catch one. Several times he swatted at them with his hands but missed; but then his hands clapped together on both sides of one's flight and it squished between his palms. Making a face as he felt the mashed insect's body between his hands, he slowly opened them to see the wasted creature. To his surprise the dead firefly was still glowing in the palms of his hands.

Excitedly, he ran back into the house, yelling, "Daddy, Daddy, I found out what it is that makes the fireflies glow!"

His dad, pleased that his son had figured out the answer to his own question, asked, "And what is it, son?"

"It's the stuff inside!" he replied proudly, showing his dad the palm of his hand.

The same thing is true of followers of Jesus Christ. What is it that gives us that glow? The Holy Spirit! It's the stuff inside." (Mike Nels as published in Homiletics).

It's the 'stuff inside,' the Holy Spirit, that enables us to share Christ's love with others. Thank God for Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit! Amen.