



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
5-19-13

- I. Most frightening verses in Bible for Episcopalians – all so unseemly.
 - a. A woman dies and goes to heaven and St. Peter takes her on a tour. They pass a pit where there are people gnashing their teeth and wailing, and the woman says, “Who’s down there?” St. Peter says, Oh those are the Catholics who ate meat on Fridays.
 - b. They walk a little further and there is another pit with more groaning and wailing and she says, “Okay, who’s down there? St. Peter answers, Those are the Baptists who went to dances. And a little farther along there is another pit and people down there gnashing their teeth and crying and ripping their garments and she says, “And those people? And St. Peter says, Those are the Episcopalians who ate their salads with their dessert forks.”
 - c. Say it ain’t so – but we do like orderly worship and structure and not having surprises.

- II. The drama of this reading is really strange and maybe a bit frightening to experience.
 - a. And the crowd gathered was bewildered, amazed, astonished. But what affected each one of them was that they could understand each other. They realized that they were all praising and talking about the wonder of God.
 - b. How might we relate to that experience – to be in a crowd and not hear your native language and then to have understanding flood over you? It is conversion through conversation – connections made through conversation.
 - c. Traveling in Europe I can sort of understand and most people made a try at English. We connected enough so that I felt comfortable there.
 - d. Experience in Verbier – during the meal understanding flowed in and we simply were similar human beings talking about the same world. I was not so different from them or they from me. Was that a miracle?

- III. When visiting South America, how isolating and frustrating to only hear Spanish. Not so where we traveled in rural Chile. How much I appreciated the merchant that gave a try with English and communicating with me.
 - a. I realized I was a bit arrogant to assume all should know some English and adapt to my questions and needs.

- IV. The Babel story touches on that arrogance that developed when all had only one language. They would consider their power and position as superior to God. They became vain and thought power belonged to them. But God and the Spirit of God is a

power that cannot be tamed. It is power that demands humility and right awareness from us.

a. God confuses their language and gives us differences in language and culture and experiences and then asks us to work together and get along.

V. Conversion from conversation. People realized their connection to God and each other through hearing each other speak the same sort of stories, the same sort of words? Conversion through conversation. A sacred breath flowing through all and connecting us to God and each other.

i. Listening and hearing each other from the heart, from sacred spirit- it can be dramatic or gentle but it will always be connecting.

VI. I think Pentecost encourages us all to practice listening from the heart and to practice speaking from the heart. Hearing someone speak in their accustomed words and transposing them into your own terms as you listen, and then replying from your understanding and differences. In such a relationship we speak freely and when we listen and speak from the heart we take our differences and realize we can reach the same point by different paths. We let the framework for understanding and cooperation be flexible. We celebrate our unity amid our diversity.

VII. Is that enough of a miracle for today? I think so. Through the breath of the Holy Spirit we can come to understanding of each other. Conversion through conversation leads to community. That is the gift of Pentecost.

Poem I found in the book *Red* by Terry Tempest Williams. The poem is by a native woman named Luci Tapahonso and called "Remember the Things They Told Us"

When you were born and took your first breath, different colors and different kinds of wind entered through your fingertips and the whorl on top of your head. Within us, as we breathe, are the light breezes that cool a summer afternoon, within us the tumbling winds that precede rain, within us sheets of hard-thundering rain, within us the dust-filled layers of wind that sweep in from the mountains.

Within us the gentle night flutters that lull us to sleep. To see this, blow on your hand now. Each sound we make evokes the power of these winds and we are, at once, gentle and powerful."

Sacred breath – powerful and gentle. The Holy Spirit binding us together throughout the entire world. Sacred breath flowing through each of us. The Holy Spirit stirring up our spirits, changing binding, bringing to life and connecting all that is. Not frightening yet totally out of our control, and totally a part of us. Sacred breath – the Holy Spirit here now.

Thanks be to God.