

## “Pentecost”

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Acts 2:1-21

John 7:37-52

“7Amazed and astonished, they asked,  
‘Are not all these who are speaking  
Galileans?

8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?  
...we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ ”

Acts 2:7-8,9b

Let us pray... O God,

You hear our prayers no matter what language we speak.

You know our human frame and you can read us like a book –

Thank you for the Book you have given us to read about you  
and help us to listen and understand what you are saying.

Amen.

Did you ever hear someone speaking in tongues?

This is a phenomenon generally associated with the Pentecostal Church,  
whose style of worship includes ‘ecstatic speech’.

I have heard people speak in tongues, alternating between English  
and expressions that I did not understand.

It was not especially emotional or out of control,

I would say that what I heard was an intentionally,  
personal conversation with God.

That may have been what the disciples were experiencing,

but for all the crowd of people also present at the event of the Pentecost  
something else was happening.

The disciples were spontaneously preaching ‘about God’s deeds of power’,  
but the diverse group of people gathered there were able to hear them  
in their own language of origin.

So, the disciples were not speaking in a common tongue,  
like Hebrew which these Jewish people from all over the world  
were likely to hear and understand.

But Egyptian Jews were hearing Galileans speak to them in Egyptian,  
Roman Jews in Latin, Jewish Elamites in Elamit-ese, and so forth.

Willard, p.2

It is sort of a reverse of the Tower of Babel story,  
about ancient people who tried to build a structure so high,  
they could be on an equal footing with God, so to speak.  
As we know now, it wouldn't matter how high they got,  
because God or Heaven are not to be found in a place that way.  
To spoil their silly plan – and befuddle them in their arrogance,  
God introduced 'foreign languages', metaphorically speaking,  
so they were not able to keep working together.

Pentecost reversed that trend so people could start working together,  
but not by giving people a new common-language.  
Pentecost is about meeting people on their terms  
and speaking their language.  
This was about giving people a new Spirit that was characterized  
by cooperation and respect for unique differences of expression,  
like language.

Dr. Maya Angelou is a well-known author, poet, college professor,  
civil rights activist – and singer.  
She has written many books about her life  
including her first, entitled, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings  
in which she tells about growing up as a little girl  
despite racism and sexism.  
Her passion for writing, dance, singing were important factors  
in driving her on to successfully overcome the challenges of her life.  
She was the first female streetcar conductor in San Francisco,  
she ran a brothel for awhile, studied calypso, lived overseas in Africa,  
earned a doctorate, became a professor of American studies  
at Wake Forest University, worked with Malcolm X and  
Martin Luther King, was married at least three times,  
and became fluent in five languages.  
This woman is alive!

I heard Dr. Angelou give the keynote speech  
at the second UCC Faith Works festival held in 1992  
at Purdue University in Indiana.  
She spoke of her early career as a singer  
and that her mother had been a Gospel singer in church.  
Now, Maya Angelou's relationship with her mother was complex –  
and she said,  
"To describe my mother would be to write about  
a hurricane in its perfect power."

Willard, p.3

There was a particular spiritual that was her mother's signature song.  
She would sing this Gospel tune on demand after prolific protests.  
She would relent and sing this beautiful song.  
Needless to say, Maya would groan with embarrassment  
every time this scene was played out by her mother.

Years later, she was on tour overseas in a Middle Eastern country  
as a singer.

On one occasion, she was performing for an Arab audience  
that called for an encore and she drew upon her memory of her mother  
and that particular Gospel song.

And Maya recounted this as a very moving experience for her –  
for one thing that her mother's song could be so significant for her still.  
But also in terms of the appreciative response of that audience –  
their respectful listening to words of a song  
they couldn't understand simply in English,  
yet recognized the Spirit of what it was about.

According to Maya Angelou, in words to this effect, she believes –  
*...that the Lord gives us art to help us to lift up our hearts, to stand up,  
by putting starch in our backbone,  
lifting us to a place where we are able to forgive somebody  
and make us a little kinder to the next human being we see;  
that is what Gospel music is supposed to do.  
Gospel music not only illuminates the beauty  
of the Afro-American church,  
but can inspire other people of not only the Christian faith,  
but other faiths to look at their own values and understand  
that human beings are more alike than different,  
as we are all part of the human family, loved by our Creator.*

Maya Angelou had a rough beginning,  
but instead of being defeated by her woundedness,  
she said she used "the scar to sharpen my pen to write a poem."

Here are some excerpts from her essay, "It's Sacred: Church"...

"Everything in God's world is sacred. Trees and toads and little girls' eyes.  
Grandfather's hands and the murmuring voices of lovers.  
All Sacred..."

"Everything can be church, and anything  
can be church."

Willard, p.4

“The breadth and depth and width and height of church  
cannot be defined.

But church can define me always; it slides the skin over my muscles  
and allows my lungs to inspirate and fill...

so that Hallelujah like rain comes from my mouth.”

“Church is where I want to go when I want a certain fulfillment  
and church is where I don't have to go,

because it is always with me,

holding me up, propelling me forward, sustaining me.”

“I am reminded that everything in God's world is sacred.”

“You said call on My name, and I'm calling,

You said trust on my Word, and I'm trusting,

You said lean on your arm and I'm leaning,

steppin' out on your word.

You said You would be my protection,

Honor and glory, my Savior, Beautiful Rose of Sharon,

steppin' out on your word.”

<http://www.christianmusic.com/church/church.htm>

*Every time I feel the Spirit, moving in my heart, I will pray...*

The word for “Spirit” in both Greek and Hebrew can mean “Wind”.

It can also mean “Breath” as in “Life-breath”.

The Holy Spirit is that aspect of God that searches us out

in those lonely desert-places in which we may wander

to be that cool, balmy zephyr that brings us back to life.

Singing comes from breathing and the potential for song is God's gift to us

and to sing with joy is our gift back to God and to one another.

Our choir is taking a break this summer

along with our music director, Monica Peidl –

though most will be here in church each Sunday

to sing in the congregation along with Joyce Brooks, our organist.

I would like to recognize our choir and music director in a special tribute

for the exceptionally fine work they do every Sunday and holy day –

and you will know what to do when the time comes,

but first, in silence, let us pray...

Amen

Acts 2:1-21

2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come,  
they were all together in one place.

2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind,  
and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them,  
and a tongue rested on each of them.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit  
and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation  
under heaven living in Jerusalem.

6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered,  
because each one heard them speaking  
in the native language of each.

7 Amazed and astonished, they asked,  
'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

8 And how is it that we hear, each of us,  
in our own native language?

9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia,  
Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia,  
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,  
and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages  
we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'

12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another,  
'What does this mean?'

13 But others sneered and said,  
'They are filled with new wine.'

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven,  
raised his voice and addressed them:

'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you,  
and listen to what I say.

15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose,  
for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 "In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

John 7:37-52

7:37 On the last day of the festival, the great day,  
while Jesus was standing there, he cried out,

‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,  
38and let the one who believes in me drink.

As the scripture has said,  
“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers  
of living water.” ’

39Now he said this about the Spirit,  
which believers in him were to receive;  
for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

40 When they heard these words, some in the crowd said,  
‘This is really the prophet.’

41Others said,  
‘This is the Messiah.’

But some asked,  
‘Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee,  
does he?

42Has not the scripture said that the Messiah  
is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem,  
the village where David lived?’

43So there was a division in the crowd because of him.

44Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

45 Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees,  
who asked them,

‘Why did you not arrest him?’

46The police answered,  
‘Never has anyone spoken like this!’

47Then the Pharisees replied,  
‘Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?’

48Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees  
believed in him?

49But this crowd, which does not know the law—  
they are accursed.’

50Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before,  
and who was one of them, asked,

51‘Our law does not judge people without first  
giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?’

52They replied,  
‘Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you?  
Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.’