

Buenos Dias, Guten Morgen, Ni Hao, Bon Jour, Mahalo, Ohayo Gozaimasu, Ahnyoung Haseyo, Shalom, Good morning!

When I meet people from different countries, I always like to learn how to say hello in their language. I think it's amazing that there are so many different languages and how many of them sound very different. Some languages sound beautiful and some very unique. I am just amazed that God created so many different languages, and many times I wonder why God created so many different languages. Wouldn't it be easier if everyone in the world spoke the same language everywhere? But then again, we wouldn't know the extent of the beauty, the vastness, and the amazement of God's creation if they were all the same.

Not just language but looking around this room, it is amazing that we all look different, each and every one of us, and THAT is the beauty of God's creation: Diversity. It is amazing that God can make us all different: making us unique and beautiful in our own way. We see this easily when we look at infants too...so different but all beautiful! Because we are so different, we can really appreciate the creativity and the diversity of all that God created.

In celebrating diversity and the amazing creation of God, we often think of the creation stories in Genesis, but how about the beauty of the church which God created on the first Pentecost, the first day the Holy Spirit came upon the people.

On that day, many Jews had come to Jerusalem from all over the world to celebrate a big Jewish Festival, a pilgrimage feast called the "Feast of Weeks", remembering and celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the first Passover, when Pharaoh let the Hebrew people leave Egypt. This was also when they received the Torah, the law of God, in the times of Moses, and the time they celebrated the harvest of wheat. A commentary points out "The usual smells around the city would have been overwhelmed by the smell of the baking of bread from all this wheat. Pouring, flowing, moving, breathing, chanting Torah -- these are the sights, sounds, and activities that characterized this two-day festival."

In the midst of these smells, sounds, and activities in the city, Jesus' disciples were gathered in the upper room of that city on the 50<sup>th</sup> day of his resurrection, anticipating the promised Advocate, the Holy Spirit to come upon them which would fill them with great peace and power that would thrust the gathered disciples out into the world to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

As we all sit here in this “upper room” gathered together, what is happening outside? What are the “smells, the sounds, the activities” in the world around us? The busyness of every day with smells of dirty laundry and dishes, or seeds ready to be planted or a garden to be worked on? Is it the pilgrimage among the piles of papers from work or bills waiting to be paid? Or is it among the overly filled calendar, many travel plans, and the airline tickets? Or maybe among the debris of brokenness of heart in relationships or the overwhelming clouds of concerns for health of self, family, or friends?

We also gather here as we know there is still “debris” from the division and pain we experienced from General Conference 2019, natural disasters around the world, wars, injustice, and oppression of the least, the lost, and the last. And we also wait as the disciples did, anticipating the peace and power that comes from the Holy Spirit which Jesus had promised. Isn't that at least one of the reasons why we gather here?

So, on that day, when Jesus' disciples gathered, they suddenly heard a sound coming from heaven like a rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house. They saw something that looked like individual flames coming down on each person, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Though the Holy Spirit came upon all people gathered in that room, it was seen as individual flames upon each person. It was evident in what happened next. Each began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. They did not speak the same language but different ones, ones which were not spoken for a very long time. Though they were Jewish, they were speaking in different languages, ones their ancestors spoke. They spoke languages that came from the different places of the world.

This part amazes me, but what my mind wanders to every time is why language? Why did the filling of the Holy Spirit manifest itself in the speaking of different languages? Why not prophetic speaking? Singing? Seeing visions? Foreseeing the future? Wisdom? Why speaking different languages to all who gathered?

And why not secretly? We are not told exactly how many were in that room who received the Holy Spirit, but suddenly, the people who experienced this became large crowds. Some were amazed, and some thought they were drunk and crazy. Then when they realized that they were not talking some crazy language but real language from their ancestors, some people were confused and amazed. This

event opened an opportunity for Peter to share the story about what God had done through Jesus; that Jesus came so that they may know God and for them to believe in Jesus because he died for all as prophesied by the Prophets. This sharing also added three thousand people to this first church!

I venture to think that the Holy Spirit could have done so many other things other than give these disciples different languages to speak, but there was a purpose to this event. As Peter shared, I believe that it was to share with others about the power of God.

In the midst of gatherings, the Holy Spirit empowers people in difficult times, providing opportunities for sharing the powerful story of Jesus that changes the world. For example, at annual conference this week, we learned that in the midst of difficult times in the history of the United Methodist Church, many gathered to examine themselves, heard and experienced God's power and call, and as they experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they moved forward into fruitfulness. In the midst of segregation of black people, The United Methodist Church affirmed their call into ministry, ordaining them and sent them out into the mission field 50 years ago. In the midst of injustice towards women, the United Methodist Church affirmed their call into ministry, sent them out into ministry through the United Methodist Women for 150 years

As our sermon series brought all this together for us, we get to know God in all that Jesus has done through the gospels, which enables us to love God by loving others. Our eyes become more open to who we are; who we are as individuals, and we realize who we are in relationship to this loving God: Marked by this Loving God, sent into the world by this Loving God, we embody this God. We are Empowered by the Loving God through the Holy Spirit.

Yes, the story of Pentecost we read about today is that one day, but we also believe that God draws near to us every day, empowering us every day giving us assurance of newness. We find hope in hard times, peace in the midst of chaos, comfort in times of pain, and resurrection in times we experience hopelessness and death. We experience this every day, which means that the presence of God through the Holy Spirit comes every day. To us every day is Easter but also Pentecost. We are empowered to live every day, but we are also reminded that we are empowered to go out as Jesus' disciples did. As they experienced themselves being filled with the Holy Spirit, they went out and shared their story of encounter and their faith in Jesus.

If we face the reality of life around us today, many things seem to suck the life out of us. We are weary, anxious, exhausted, worn out, and diminished, but we anticipate the coming of the spirit every day as God is with us always, empowering us to love God and love others.