

**HEAR THE SPIRIT**  
***Sermon for Pentecost B- Acts 2:1-21***  
LPC, 5/24/15

Years ago, before I entered seminary, I took a class in New Testament from a conservative Presbyterian preacher. It was wonderful, but there was one thing the teacher said that upset me. He claimed that John the Baptist was the very last of God's prophets.

I assume you know who John the Baptist was – he was the cousin of Jesus of Nazareth. John was a preacher in his own right. He foretold Jesus' coming, testified to Jesus as the Lamb of God, and baptized Jesus in the River Jordan. Thereafter he attracted the enmity of Herod's wife and was beheaded.

Now to identify John, who lived in first-century Palestine, as the last prophet of God's Word in the world is about the most depressing thing I've ever heard spoken by a man of God. If I really believed God had completely stopped speaking through God's people in the world I think I'd just have to throw myself off a bridge.

Now I understand where my evangelical colleague was coming from. Like most evangelicals, he was maintaining the unique integrity of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. I respect that. The Bible clearly has preeminence over some Joe in the street, or on the TV or the internet, who claims to be speaking for God. But surely God continues to speak to, and through, God's people.

That is one of the reasons why, here at Lawrencefield, we started that experiment with replacing the Prayer Book response to scripture readings in church, "The Word of the Lord," with the language approved for trial use in 1996: "Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people." Yes, the Bible is the Word of God, but it is less a lecture from God than God's side of a conversation.

The Incarnation of God in human form as Jesus of Nazareth proves that God was not content to pronounce things into creation and then step back. Through Jesus God literally entered into conversation with human beings. Through the Holy Spirit God continues God's conversation with human beings.

That is what Pentecost is all about: God continuing God's conversation with human beings through the Holy Spirit. How desperately God wants to converse with human beings – with all human beings! God showed this by making Godself understood by people of different languages at Pentecost.

There are some parishes where an attempt is made to recreate the atmosphere of Pentecost. People who speak different languages are asked to read the account in Acts 2, which we just heard, simultaneously in whatever language beside English they speak. The result is usually cacophony, which I think defeats the message of Pentecost.

The point of Pentecost is not that the Word of God is many layers of dissonant sound, but just the opposite. The point of Pentecost is that the Word of God is finally understood by everyone

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who hears it. This enables the Word of God to travel to the ends of the earth, through the mouths of prophets in every time, in every language, in every place.

If you were here last week, you heard me speak about Jesus' Ascension, and how the person of Jesus of Nazareth ascending to heaven enabled the descent of the Holy Spirit. I told you last week I would tell you more about the Holy Spirit's descent this week at Pentecost, so I'm doing it. Remember what Jesus said in last week's Gospel?

"And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world and I am coming to you.... As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

This is a passing of the mantle. This is a succession ceremony. Jesus ascends to the Father, so now the job of spreading the Gospel passes to the disciples, to us. In the Ascension, Jesus confers the authority, in Pentecost, God gives us the tools. We are to pick up where Jesus left off when he ascended to heaven. Which means we too have to be prophets.

Oh, is that all?

OK, don't panic. Being a prophet cannot be as a lofty an ambition as it sounds, or God would not ask it of us. Like anything else, being a prophet starts with a first step. Don't worry about all the other steps until you take the first step. Being a prophet starts with something very, very simple. The Book of Acts tells us how. Being a prophet starts with the act of hearing: Of hearing God's speak in one's own language.

This means that if you are an intellectual, God may speak to you through reason. If you are empathetic, God may speak to you with feelings. And if you are broken, God will speak to you in your brokenness. Wherever you are, whatever you are, God speaks to you there. Hear what the Spirit is saying to you.

Hear. What the Spirit. Is saying. To. You.

I conclude with a Litany for Pentecost from a publication called *Models for Ministers I* and quoted in this book (*Imaging the Word, vol. 3*):

When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place and all of the many foreigners heard the witnesses speaking in their own tongue.

*Come Holy Spirit, witness to us also in our several languages.*

Speak in the language of our need. Let us hear how our deepest hungers, desires, and aspirations can be fulfilled by your goodness and in your service.

*Come Holy Spirit, give us that good news again.*

Speak in the language of our fear. Let us hear how our worries about the future, and about each other, and about ourselves, can find rest in your providential care.

*Come Holy Spirit, give us that encouraging news again....*

Speak in the language of our gratitude. Let us hear how our honest thanks relate us, not only to those with whom we live, but also to you, the Lord and Giver of life.

*Come, Holy Spirit, give us that enlarging news again....*

Speak to us in the language of hope. Let us hear how our yearning and our expectations are not just wishful thinking, but responses to your promise.

*Come, Holy Spirit, give us that good news again....*