

*New Every Morning*  
A sermon preached by  
Dean L. Francis  
Pentecost - June 4, 2017

## **Acts 2:1-21**

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”*

*<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>‘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. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’*

Thursday night I sat down to watch the Cubs, only to discover that they had the day off. Who knew that ESPN would be broadcasting the National Spelling Bee? In a fairly short period of time I was hooked. Now that’s not because I’m a great speller, I am not. I only recently learned that i comes before e except after c. But I was hooked by watching the other-worldly talent the participants displayed. Standing there with steely eyed gazes, carefully asking questions about the word’s pronunciation, definition, and derivation. Spelling out the word on

their palms or their forearms as the clock counted down and they were required to stand and deliver the spelling of a word that they often had never seen or heard before that night. But drawing on their knowledge of the word's derivation they were able to construct a spelling that was correct more often than not. This is what enabled Ananya Vinay, a twelve-year-old from Fresno, California to win the competition. Knowing where the words came from was the key.

In the Pentecost story, knowing where the words come from is also the key. Acts tells the story of the early church gathering together indoors, away from the action. Maybe they are lighting candles and sharing a meal talking about the good old days with Jesus. But quickly they are driven outside and their indoor seclusion becomes an outdoor public proclamation. They have a message not just for their own edification, but for the world's.

It would have been easy for Peter to have become the resident expert, to become the one who has all of the knowledge, the one and only interpreter. Like the guy behind the table the other night with the correct spelling. However, Peter insists that God's Spirit is poured out widely, across social boundaries.

The Spirit empowers interpretation that happens corporately. Peter and church leaders in Acts are not the only ones to hear from the Spirit. Throughout the narrative they haltingly live into God's future, themselves susceptible to error and reliant on many others to make sense of God's ways. This is the choppy work, the inspired work, of all God's people.

So the spirit comes and enables all of the church to speak in the native languages of all of the surrounding regions. This God-filling language doesn't just come to a chosen few, it doesn't only come to the men in the group or the adults. It comes to men and women, free and slaves, young and old. And Acts does not regard Pentecost as an entirely singular occurrence. This scene introduces a sequence of occasions in which the Spirit mobilizes Jesus' followers and inaugurates new directions for ministry and community. The Spirit continues to nudge believers toward new horizons.

In case you haven't gotten your Pentecost shopping done, it has finally happened: in the ultimate commercialization of faith. Pentecost has now made it to Pinterest. Check it out on your mobile device – well, not right now, but sometime. They have everything from fake flames to dove head bands now available for purchase. It's all too cute for words.

But it totally misses the point, because the Acts story is about an occasion that engenders fear and bewilderment rather than celebration. It is not Sweetest Day for the church. Instead, the

parallel here is to the eschatological day of the Lord. Pentecost is both its forerunner and, paradoxically, its fulfillment. The Holy Spirit proves not to be a quiet, heavenly dove, but rather a violent force that blows the church into being. That church consists mainly of immigrants, people of different languages and cultures with different mother tongues. They eventually come from a variety of different religious backgrounds. To these, the message goes forth, a message of the coming of the Day of the Lord, full of heavenly portents and prophetic women, slaves, and free men.

But in the midst of the chaos of Pentecost rests an anchor. It says that each of us can be called, chosen, claimed by the spirit's power. Suddenly what is frightening and mysterious becomes frightening because its direction for our lives is so clear.

This afternoon four members of our congregation will be ordained at the Northern Illinois Annual Conference in St. Charles for a lifetime of Christian service: Lindsey Long Joyce, Matthew Krings, Cal Haines, and Mary Rawlinson will kneel before the Bishop and be set apart for this crazy, scary, relentless work. When each of them came to me, as they are required to do before they enter the ordination process, I asked each of them, "Are you sure? Do you have any idea what you are getting yourself into?" And I told them to "go away" and reconsider this crazy idea. Now they join Jane, Bonny, and a long line of people who have ignored my advice, because our church has created a culture of call, an environment where it is possible to entertain the impossible...that God could use even you.

So today on Pentecost Sunday I ask you, what is God calling you to do and be? What service or witness could claim you if only you'd start to listen to the voices of those who speak in a different tongue. Words of grace instead of anger, words of mercy instead of revenge, words of hope instead of despair. When you know where the words come from, this is what helps us to recognize them. They are God's words, they are new every morning. Like the spirit's power they renew, reform, and claim us. So, perhaps you too should go away quickly, before God claims you. AMEN