

Hearing in our Own Language

A sermon preached by

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Pentecost / Confirmation Sunday

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Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 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? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

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

So, confirmands, here is the burning question that I have for you this morning. In that video posted by Cloe Feldman that has gone viral on the Internet this week, what do you hear: Laura or Yanny? Raise your hands, Laura/Yanny. For those of you who have not heard about this great controversy, Cloe posted an audio clip from dictionary.com of the word Laura, because to her, it sounded like Yanny. It seems that when you play the clip for a large group of people,

some hear one thing and others hear another.

Just down the street at Northwestern University, Dr. Nina Kraus, a neurobiology professor, says, “It is not at all surprising to me that two different people will take a sound that is admittedly acoustically ambiguous and hear it differently.”

I was talking about this with Candi in the church office this week and she said this great controversy reminded her of the Pentecost lesson this morning from Acts. The story tells of the Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and there was a great commotion where everyone was speaking in different languages. Luke says that they were bewildered *because each one heard them speaking in their own language*.

I must admit that sometimes I hear you guys talking, or my staff talking, or people in the congregation talking, and I don't have any idea what any of you are talking about. You guys use words that are completely foreign to me. My staff was talking about Netflix shows last week and I was utterly lost because I'm more a binge reader than watcher. If you have ever hung out with Methodists, they use language, terms, and labels that would require Pentecost to interpret to the outside world. There is just a whole lot of acoustically ambiguous stuff out there.

If you go back to Professor Kraus, who runs a laboratory on the biology of how humans process sound, her research shows that people fill in the gaps of their hearing when faced with a noisy context. Much of what you hear, she says, is about what you're expecting to hear.¹

There is an old Beatles song, entitled “Love is All You Need.” One day I was singing along with it in the car, except I thought the lyrics said, “Love is a honey bee.” Nora looked at me and said, “You're kidding me, right?” What! Love is a honey bee, you know sometimes it stings a little. You hear what you are expecting to hear.

So, what does this mean to the Confirmation Class of 2018 here at First Church? Well, first I think it means that by joining the church you agree to be a part of a community that hears the voices in the world differently. To feed the poor, heal the sick, comfort those who mourn, isn't always what the world hears or does. In a world where concern for the common good has been changed to “I've got mine, you go fish,” that hearing is counter cultural. Because when you are confirmed this morning you will be a part of a community, a faith that hears the gospel story and responds differently. And it places an obligation on those of us that follow Jesus to hear and

¹ <http://www.brainvolts.northwestern.edu/index.php>

then act.

Secondly, we as a church will be changed by you, we will hear differently because you will look around and say, This isn't fair or just or right. And you will challenge us to change. You will bring new ears to us. That is the blessing of a church that is growing and changing to meet the needs of the current world, and you will lead us to and through that reality. That is what Acts' author meant when he wrote, *your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*. We look forward to what you have to say and we pray that God will give us ears to hear.

So welcome to this weird, crazy world called the church. We look forward to joining you on a ride as wild as the day of Pentecost.

Amen