

At Home Worship
May 31, 2020
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Let us come together and celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit!

For when we have been weak, the Holy Spirit has sustained us.

When we have journeyed in Christ's name, the Spirit has guided us.

When we were sick or in harm's way, the Spirit of the Lord was with us.

When we have sought understanding and wisdom, God's Spirit led us.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

God of power and might, who inspired a rag-tag group of apostles on that first Day of Pentecost, fill us with your Spirit this day; that, like them, we too may depart this building refreshed and rekindled for a mission of faith and hope to the world. In the name of the resurrected and ascended Christ we pray. Amen

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit" #408

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
There are sweet expressions on each face, And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.

Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove, Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise; without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived, when we shall leave this place.

There are blessings you cannot receive till you know Him in His fullness and believe; You're the one to profit when you say, "I am going to walk with Jesus all the way."

Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove, Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise; without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived, when we shall leave this place.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Inspiring God, it pains us to confess to you how resistant and closed we are to the movement of your Spirit, as though we dare you to kindle our souls. Forgive us, we pray. Set us afire; blow us away; leave us utterly speechless with the irresistible power of your life-giving spirit; then drive us into the world with your message and ministry of compassion and hope.

Silent Confession Amen.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Friends believe the Good News! In Jesus we are forgiven!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” #286

1. Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.
2. Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure, until with thee I will one will, to do and to endure.
3. Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine, till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.
4. Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die, but live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity.

Engaging the Word

Pentecostal Power

Acts 2:1-13

Eugene Barron of Littleton, Colorado tells of driving down a two-lane highway where someone had thrown garbage onto the road. Most of it had been scattered off the road except one plastic cup. This cup was positioned right in the middle of road. In fact, it was in the center of the two yellow lines. The road was straight enough that Barron noticed the cup long before he got to it. Every time a car passed by the cup, it would simply roll to the opposite side without moving from the center. When another car from the other direction came by, the force of the wind would blow the cup to the other side. When two cars passed at the same time the cup went wild. It did not know which way to go.

Many of us are like that paper cup--we are blown by each prevailing wind. Wouldn't it be great to be so focused, so determined, that you made each moment of every day focused, meaningful, powerful? I want to show you from the story of the first Pentecost, the church's birthday, how you can have Pentecostal power in your work and in your family, and how we can have that same power in our church.

Most of you know the story well. On the day of Pentecost the followers of Jesus were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And suddenly they were aware of something like tongues of fire resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues.

But here is what is even more important. Jerusalem was filled with devout people from many nations, and when they heard the followers of Jesus sharing their testimony, each of the foreigners heard them tell about the great acts of God in their own language. And they were amazed, for they knew that those who were doing the testifying were uneducated, unsophisticated Galileans. And they asked, “How can this be?”

Something spectacular, life-changing, world-shaking happened on the day of Pentecost. Wouldn't it be nice if we could tap into that? Wouldn't it be nice if we could appropriate that burst of power for our own lives?

First of all, we see in this story a miracle of communication.

People from different nations heard the followers of Jesus in their own tongue. We need to make one thing perfectly clear. Jesus' followers were not speaking in unknown tongues at Pentecost. Just the opposite. They were speaking in the exact tongues of the people who were listening. The communication was not restricted to a few. It was opened up to as many people as possible.

This is important. So often Christians speak in code. If you are not part of the group, you have difficulty understanding what's being said. You hear the words, but they are not words with which you can relate. Pastors particularly can be guilty of this. Perhaps you have heard a pastor speak for thirty minutes on sin and never define what sin is. Or what particular sin he or she is talking about. That is why we use examples, anecdotes, and analogies. Some people may wonder why I use so many stories. I want everyone in this room to understand exactly what I am talking about. I want the message to be understood by the youngest member of our congregation and the oldest. And so I use lots of stories. Because everyone can understand a story. The miracle of Pentecost is a miracle of communication.

Pastor Bob Malcomb was on a mission trip in Belarus, where his team was building churches. His translator and guide was named Eger. Eger told Pastor Malcomb that the Russian words, “Dos-Vee-Don-Ya” and “Pa-Ka” were old-hat. He needed to get with the times and say good-bye the modern way.

They were designing seven churches and at the end of meeting with the pastor of each church, Pastor Malcomb used the new phrase he had learned, “Val- EE-Et-Suda.” He could tell by the look on their faces they were quite impressed with his Russian. However the last pastor took him aside and said, “Robert why do you keep telling each pastor to ‘Get lost’ at the end of the meeting?”

When you are communicating in another language, you must be very precise. But even in our own language, the better we communicate, the more effective we will be. Mis-communication

can cause embarrassing situations. You may remember the story about the couple who were going out for the evening. They called a taxi and put the cat out for the evening.

The taxi arrived, and as the couple walked out the front door, the cat shot back in. They didn't want the cat shut in the house, so the wife went out to the taxi while the husband went upstairs to chase the cat out. The wife, not wanting it known that the house would be empty explained to the taxi driver, "My husband's just going upstairs to say goodbye to my mother." A few minutes later, the husband climbed into the cab. "Sorry I took so long," he said, "Stupid old thing was hiding under the bed and I had to poke her with a coat hanger to get her to come out!" Mis-communication can be embarrassing.

A few years ago, radio broadcaster Mort Crim and his producer were taping a documentary in Cairo, Egypt. Their visit came not long after Egypt's President, Anwar Sadat, had been assassinated. They hoped to include in the documentary an interview with Sadat's widow. The producer made a routine phone call to their station back in the U.S. mentioning that he thought they "had a good shot at Mrs. Sadat tomorrow." Within minutes, the Egyptian police were at their door.

Evidently, the phones were being tapped by Egyptian security forces. The Egyptians, unfamiliar with American slang, had been alarmed by the comment that they "had a good shot at Sadat's widow." Mort Crim and his producer had some fast explaining to do to keep from being carted off to jail. You never know who might be listening to your words, or how your listeners might interpret what you say. The miracle of Pentecost was, first of all, a miracle of communication.

Even more important, it was a miracle of connection.

The followers of Jesus connected with their audience. Have you ever heard a speaker speaking, and his language is eloquent, and he has good stories to tell, but somehow his words zing right by you? Communication experts say that is a problem of "connection." They tell us that this is the most important part of the communication process: Does the speaker connect with the audience?

Sometimes we communicate the best when we say nothing at all. Pastor Ed Young, in his book *Romancing the Home*, suggests that husbands learn two techniques for listening to their wives: the "hold the bucket" technique and "the mirror stance." Men are fixers, so when women talk about their problems men usually want to offer solutions. But women often talk about their problems in order to sort through their feelings and look at the problem from all angles. They don't want a solution as much as they want understanding and empathy. The best thing for a husband to do when his wife has a problem is to "hold the bucket": just let her express her emotions without offering any advice or judgment. Or, a husband could use "the mirror stance": just reflect his wife's feelings back to her. Re-state whatever she says in his own words. This allows her to clarify her emotions and to know that she is understood. Both of these forms of listening will make a woman feel loved and respected.

Can you see how powerful this concept of connection is? If you want to be more powerful in your communication, first of all, you need to stop talking. You need to listen to the other

person. You need to walk in his or her shoes. That way when you speak you are not simply mouthing words. You are connecting at a profound level with another human being. As writer Stephen Covey puts it: “We seek first to understand, then to be understood.” This is what God did in Jesus Christ. God put on our shoes. God walked where we walk. God built a connection.

It doesn’t always work, of course. There were some who heard the disciples testifying on the Day of Pentecost and thought they were drunk. They didn’t hear anything at all that was meaningful. And they were probably people who had no difficulty understanding the disciples’ words. They simply weren’t connected. The miracle of Pentecost was as much about listening as it was about speaking.

A Southern mom was talking with her young son about why all their relatives from the North “talk funny.” “They have a different accent,” she explained. “Everybody talks in different ways,” she continued. “To them, we sound like we talk very slow, and all our words are drawn out.” His eyes got big, and he asked, “You mean they hear funny, too?”

Not everybody who listened to the apostles on that first Pentecost understood what they were saying. Only those who were connected. Pentecost is about communication. And it is about connection, listening as well as speaking.

Finally, the Miracle of Pentecost is about cooperation.

You know what happened following the gift of the spirit at Pentecost. They were wildly successful in reaching their objectives. Daily new people were added to the church. They grew closer to one another. They shared all things in common. They ate together, and they prayed together, and they sang together and they witnessed together. They were a team in every sense of the word.

In the summer of 1995, a movie, Apollo 13, commemorated the 25th anniversary of the famous space flight. Starring Tom Hanks, the movie captured the imagination of Americans as it played in sold-out theaters across the country. More than simply a retelling of history, the movie inspired viewers with its sense of the exhilaration and pride that comes from working together toward a goal worth achieving. The flight of Apollo 13 was beset by obstacles. An explosion on board forced a change of plans to land on the moon and shifted the mission into a frenzied endeavor to return the astronauts home safely. On the ground, mission control teams worked frantically to come up with alternatives that could replace damaged equipment. In the spacecraft, the three astronauts pooled talents, experience and energy to create a focused cohesive unit with one mission in mind. Only with the cooperation of everyone involved were the astronauts able to navigate their crippled capsule back to earth.

In short, they cooperated with one another. It has been shown time and time again. When people work as a team, they can achieve amazing things. Here is how Rudyard Kipling put it: “Now this is the law of the jungle--As old and true as the sky; and the wolf that keeps it may prosper; but the wolf that shall break it must die. As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk, the law runneth forward and back--And the strength of the pack is the wolf /and the strength of the wolf is the pack.”

That's an important thought. The strength of the wolf is the pack. Want to know how to build a great business or a great family or a great church? Learn the meaning of these three words: communication, connection, cooperation. In fact, these are three of the signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church. Listen to them again: communication, connection, cooperation.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Spirit of the Living God" x 2 #288

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me; mold me; fill me, use me, Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me; mold me; fill me, use me, Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen. Gal. 6:18