

“Songs of Joy in New Languages!”
C Pentecost; Acts 2:1-21
May 23, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

A Sound Like a Strong Wind

2 ¹⁻⁴ When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

5-11 There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were blown away. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, “Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?”

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;
Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;
Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes;
Even Cretans and Arabs!

“They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!”

12 Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: “What's going on here?”

13 Others joked, “They're drunk on cheap wine.”

Peter Speaks Up

14-21 That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: “Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

“In the Last Days,” God says,
“I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions,
your old men dream dreams.
When the time comes,
I'll pour out my Spirit
On those who serve me, men and women both,
and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above
and signs on the earth below,
Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help
to me, God, will be saved.”

WHAT LANGUAGE GOD?

What language does God speak to you in? What language does God hear you speak back? What language do you *hear* when God speaks? How do you most clearly hear that—that God is speaking to you? How do we collectively hear the Holy One whisper in our ear, or roar in the highways and byways of life? “God is still speaking” came to us in the UCC from a centuries-old faith tradition. One of our forebears, John Robinson said *“I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word”*

This was adopted by the United Church of Christ as a needed counter to the bumper sticker theology that says, “God said it. I believe it. That’s settles it!” As if. As if the canon were closed, once and for all—even though the debate about which books of the bible would be included and which verses most listened to, was a debate over many centuries and in many corners of the world.

As if God stopped revelation—stopped whispering in our ears, speaking in the still, small voice or in the earthquake, wind and Fire, all of a sudden one day and never started again. As if God’s thoughts on things and our understanding of how to follow divine teaching was all written in stone, nevermore to have light shed upon it.

Instead, the UCC has based its approach to faith on just the opposite approach to faith—nothing is set in stone or locked down—that would severely limit the God of Revelation for all time!

God’s speaking Matters to Us

“God has yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy word.”

One UCC leader makes it very personal for us in our walk of faith:

“If you think God’s not finished with you yet, guess what? God’s not even finished with God yet! God isn’t finished with you, or finished with the church or our world, or even letting us know more about God’s own compassion, justice, hope, and truth.

If you are open, if you listen carefully, you’ll discover what God is saying to this generation at this time in history. There’s more good news to be heard!

We, the UCC, believe that God was revealed in the past, but also in the present and the future. In the Bible, God was known through covenants with people and nations, through prophets and teachers, through conflicts and commandments, in visions and songs, and through the followers of Jesus and the church.

God acted *profoundly* in the life and ministry, even in the death, of Christ. On Easter, God declared in the

resurrection of Jesus Christ, “I’ll never, never stop speaking. Alleluia!” Throughout history, in moments of compassion, justice, and peace, in our worship, sacraments, prayer, seeking, action, and silence, God continues to speak.

GOD SPEAKS IN CREATION TOO!

Celtic Spirituality is a wonderful example of God still speaking down through the ages of infant Christianity; through different branches of Christianity; down through the expanses of lands, islands and humanity. John Phillip Newell, a Celtic Scholar, reminds us of the ancient wisdom of Saint Erugenia, that God’s Word is revealed to us in TWO books—the Little Book we call the Bible and the Big Book of Creation.

Celtic Christianity helps us to live fully into this refreshing branch of our faith. In our time, especially.

It’s: “a spirituality that sees God in the whole of life and regards all things as inter-related. In all creation, and in all the people of creation, the light of God is there to be glimpsed, in the rising of the morning sun, in the moon at night and at the heart of the life of any person, even if that person is of an entirely different religious tradition or of no religious tradition.”

As we celebrate the Birthday of the Church on this Day of Pentecost, we celebrate that church is everywhere! This can free our hearts in life-giving ways. No longer

do we need to feel “guilty” for climbing a mountain on a Sunday morning instead of going to church! As if God weren’t waiting to commune with us there, on that spiritual peak, too!

Newell and the Celts remind us that it’s “both/and”—all of the above, and never, “either/or.”

This spiritual tradition is one “that can stand free of the four walls of the Church, for the sanctuary of God is not separate from but contained within the whole of creation.yet that sanctuary of God is *also* found in the Church and its traditions and sacraments. It is a rock, a place of security and shelter.

“To turn with faith to the familiar house of prayer where our mothers and fathers and those before them have for centuries found truth and guidance.....these ways of seeing can combine to create a spirituality that is simultaneously well-rooted in a specific tradition and open to God in the whole of life.”

How often do we get caught into thinking what we “should” do instead of what our soul longs for? Because we’ve been so ingrained to think of our spiritual lives as a “have to” rather than a “get to.” How about we embrace the outdoor, natural world experiences of God fully and wholly *and* wholly seek community and grounding rituals and traditions and

teachings that guide and inspire us in all our life—in its entirety? Sunday through Saturday?!

Newell puts it:

“Most of us will have had the experience of walking to Church in the light of the morning or evening and feeling reluctant to leave the freshness of the wind or the colours of the sky to enter an enclosed building, sometimes terribly stifling or cluttered and unimaginative in design. Sometimes we need not the busyness of a church but the solitude of a hill to be still and attentive to God.

“On the other hand, most of us have also experienced in the words, silence and sacraments of Church liturgy an opening of our inner vision, so that on our return home we see the elements of creation around us with fresh eyes.

And, so importantly:

“In times of trouble and loneliness, how we not all drawn comfort from singing hymns and saying prayers in a congregation of men and women who like us, have known temptation, loss and emptiness?

Occasionally it is not the open air or the church that we desire, but both.”

Newell shares a memory of an evening on the Isle of Wight.

“Toward sunset, I was out walking, with open fields on one side and trees lining the path. The air was clear and calm and I was hearing the birds’ closing song for the day. For a long time I stood under a great pine, looking at its height and feeling its ancient life, aware that all was being enfolded by the sun’s last light. I did not have to move; I was alone.

A minute later I was standing in the chapel of Quarr Abbey listening to the monks changing and allowing my prayers to rise with the incense. I knew that in two different way I had experienced one continuous act of worship.

“We find what we need in both and all of the above experiences. “The glorious rays of the sunset and the fine singing of Benedictine monks. And, “in times of confusion, betrayal or failure, we often find that the words of a church service give voice to our yearnings. Similarly, the Church can guide our longings for justice in the world. The words of the prophetic tradition, for instance, will sharpen our sense of urgency and passion for justice in society.

So come, on this Birthday of the Church and FIND Church—wherever you are on life’s journey.

Come and listen for the still-speaking God—wherever you may find Her. Listen for the birds and wind and

flowing streams speaking *back* to God—each in their own language.

Listen for your own heartbeat—the language of your Creator—who still has much to say to you, God’s Beloved.

Come, Holy, Spirit, come.

Come and move in and through us.

Whispers of hope around the corner of despair;
shouts of joy at a graduation:

You are around us in every place.

The sweet breath of a baby,
the remembrances of the elderly:

You speak to us through every person.

Soft breezes on a summer’s day;
bitter winds through frozen trees:

You are with us in every season.

The gentle lullabies of a parent;
the birds twittering us awake:

You sing glad songs to us.

The sudden rush of newness
throwing open our sheltered fears;
the gale of justice breaking down
the walls of oppression:

**You sweep us up in your commitment
to transform all lives, all places.**

In every breath, in every song,
in every moment, in every tongue:

Come

Dance

Enflame

EngulfTransform us!

5/23 -- Prayer of the Day *(by Thom Shuman)* ***You come like a dove,
Anointing God, in every time, in every place, in every language and
way of communicating, announcing through your Spirit that we are
your Beloved. Amen.***