

The Day of Pentecost
May 24, 2026
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel reading: John 20:19-23

Focus: Christ has set all people free that all may call upon the name of the Lord.

Function: I am preaching this sermon to my congregants to thank God for the Holy Spirit who is our advocate for a transformed life.

Let us pray: Lord, You showed us the power of the Holy Spirit when those gathered in Jerusalem experienced the miracle of hearing their own languages being spoken by others. Inspire us to breakdown our differences, to come together united in truth, justice, compassion and hope. Amen.

Today, is a joyous day in the church because we celebrate the Day of Pentecost.

The word Pentecost originally came from the Greek word, *pentekostos*, meaning “fiftieth.” Our scripture in Acts read in Gaelic by Nigel says that during the Spring harvest festival, when the disciples were all together in one place, Luke tells us, that the Holy Spirit descended on 120 believers in Jerusalem on the fiftieth day after Jesus's resurrection. The Spirit empowered them to testify in different languages God's saving work, emboldened the apostle Peter to preach to a bewildered crowd of Jewish skeptics, and drew three thousand converts from

around the known world in one day. Besides the gifting of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost also marks the birthday of the Church that we have today.

The story Luke describes is a fantastical one, full of details that challenge the imagination. Tongues of fire erupted. Rushing winds blew. Bold preaching and mass baptism occurred. But at its heart, the Pentecost story is not about spectacle and drama. It's about the promise of God spoken through the Prophet Joel: The Holy Spirit was to come at the last days, so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. From that day on, the Holy Spirit showed up and transformed ordinary, imperfect, frightened people into the Body of Christ. God continues to *disrupt and re-orient* our engagement with the sacred, so that something new and holy can be born within and among us.

Scripture says that on that day, the disciples were “filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. At this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.” Notice that it not only involved people speaking in a foreign language, but it was done so for the benefit of those who could understand.

For many of us who are bilingual, or better yet, many here are well versed in many languages, we understand that a language is more than a combination of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. Languages carry the full weight of their respective cultures, histories, psychologies, and spiritualities. To speak one language as opposed to another is to orient oneself differently in the world , often allowing us to see the world with a different perspective. Languages allow us to cross into other borders which challenge our stereotypes of others. For myself who can speak cantonese and English, I constantly find myself crossing over from Chinese culture and thought to American culture and thought. On the day of Pentecost, when people heard their languages spoken during the Holy Spirit's descent, I can only imagine how personal it must have felt to them. The word of the Lord opened up to them like never before, it gave them ownership of God's words and promises.

The feeling of ownership and welcome can come in other ways than just language. How can we make others who have not heard the gospel feel welcome as well? Today, the gospel has reached most parts of the world. But according to the Joshua Project, a non-profit global ethnological and missionary research group, data shows that there are still thousands of ethnic groups that have not heard of Jesus Christ.

The gospel message of inclusion needs to be shared more than ever before to bridge our divided world. We live at a time when we are becoming more tribal as a nation, and even in our own faith communities. Can this Pentecost day remind us that God poured out the Holy Spirit on us, so that we might learn new and life-giving ways of being the Church? What languages and practices do we need to speak that we have never spoke before? Where does the fire need to fall, to burn away all our prejudices that hinder us in this dark time?

Do we need to speak a language that children, youth, college students and young adults can understand to make our liturgy and the gospel meaningful? Do we need to speak the language of generosity and care for people living on the streets? Do we need to speak the language of reconciliation to people we disagree with? All this requires us to learn a different language? This is why the Holy Spirit was sent, in order for us to make this happen.

When the disciples and their friends began to speak in foreign languages, the crowds gathered outside their meeting place understood them. They were not confused by the message of Jesus Christ itself; the message came through with clarity in their respective languages. What the crowds found astonishing was that they were included. That God, the Divine, would welcome them so intimately,

with words and expressions hearkening back to their birthplaces, their childhoods, their beloved cities, countries, and cultures of origin. On that day, what they heard was, “In this Spirit-filled place, this new and fledging church that is about to blossom, everyone is included. No longer are you an outsiders but you are an equal. Come in and feel at home. You belong here!” Just as our Episcopal motto says, “ The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.”

On that day, when tongues were untangled, when ethnic barriers were shattered, we begin to discover the other person, that God's "great deeds" are far too nuanced for a single tongue, a single fluency.

The Pentecost story is for our modern world. As we continue to face the discouraging and divisive language around us, Pentecost reminds us that we are part of a much larger whole. Pentecost occurred in order to break down any barriers that holds people back from the gospel of love. Pentecost also reminds us that we don't live in a bubble, instead the gospel is meant to reach across every divide. The question is, are we willing to learn how to speak another language of love?

Christ has set the church in motion to do his work in the world. It's a joyous day, because as the body of Christ, we are given the Holy Spirit to do unimaginable things. St. Michael is here to do unimaginable things. Are you willing to pray for the church to see where the Holy Spirit is leading us to? Are we willing to cross over bridges so that people can see the gospel practiced in our lives? The Holy Spirit gave us all a new powerful voice, let's be an advocate for many who are less privileged and fortunate than ourselves. Amen.