

**June 5, 2022**  
**Pentecost Sunday**

**Meditation:** "Tongues"

You all know why people gathered from all over the ancient world to build the tower in Babel, right?

Because many lands make height work.

Okay then. We've established that you are awake and paying attention.

Shavuot, the Jewish festival celebrated 49 days after Passover started last night at sundown, and goes to sundown tomorrow. In Greek, Shavuot becomes Pentecost, which literally means 50, since Pentecost is the 50<sup>th</sup> day since Easter. In Judaism, Shavuot is a festival that celebrates the great marriage between God and humankind. It is symbolized in bread and wine, which is interesting because today we are celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Old Testament lesson for today is about tongues or languages. It seems that at the tower of Babel humanity was about to set aside its need for and trust in God. Perhaps they did not trust that God would come to them. Perhaps they did not believe that God was already with them. They did not need God to come to them, they were going to bridge the gap to God on their own. They were going to build a tower that reached into the heavens. They were going out in search of God. God saw what they were doing, and confounded their efforts by confusing their language. They could no longer understand one another, and therefore could not coordinate their efforts. I guess the idea is that if they could no longer depend on one another, they would have to depend on God.

That may be all well and good in that case, but, fast forward several centuries, having many languages becomes a problem when it comes to spreading the Gospel. The disciples spoke only a few languages between them. How were they to communicate the good news of God's love for us to everyone when they couldn't speak the language? Enter the Holy Spirit.

According to the reading from the book of Acts, you know the reading, you've all heard it many times before, the Holy Spirit blows into town like a mighty rushing wind, sort of like the derecho we had a couple of weeks ago, and settles, like tongues of flame on the disciples. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel was heard in the language of the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs.

When I read the passage, two things struck me. The first is that all of those people heard God's message to them in their own tongue. Amazing. The second thing that struck me is that 3000 people were added to the church that day. That's a lot of people. There are an awful lot of languages listed. Can you imagine trying to hold a worship service for 3000 people with all of those different languages? Impossible you say? Right! They didn't all meet in one huge megachurch. There wasn't one. They met the only place they had to meet, the homes of the members of the church. These 3000 people were one church, one in the body of Christ, but they met as numerous small congregations. Think about that the next time you lament the current size of your congregation.

So here's another interesting fact about the great marriage between God and humankind that is celebrated during Shavuot. It is symbolized not only in bread and wine, but it is also symbolized in the hearing of God's word, which is interesting given the lesson from the book of Acts is about all those people hearing the Good News of the Kingdom of God in their own language or tongue.

Is it just me, or did others just realize that tongues of flame appeared to rest upon the disciples, who then spoke in many tongues or languages?

It's interesting thinking about these two passages of scripture together. In one case, people all speaking the same language seem to be trying to make themselves gods, and so God confuses their language to stop their efforts. In the second case, people of many languages hear God's message to humankind in their own tongue. In one case God uses

language as a barrier, in the second, God overcomes the barrier so that everyone, everyone, everyone can hear God's message.

Okay, you're getting antsy and are starting to ask, 'so what?', 'what does any of this have to do with us today?'

So, ask yourselves, are you listening for God's message for us today? What is it that God wants us to hear? God's call to worship God? God's call to community? God's call to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God? God's call to seek justice that is necessary to create community? When we worship, and share, and care, and seek justice, and resist evil, and seek reconciliation, and build the Kingdom of God, it doesn't matter what language we speak with our tongues, for our faith and our actions speak the language of God's love for humankind and for all living creatures. And when we know that God loves us, and is for us, we don't need to build towers to the heavens in search of God, for God is already with us. Thanks be to God.