

Pentecost

The disciples were gathered in one place, all of them together, just as Jesus had instructed them. Ten days had passed since the time they saw him ascending into heaven. They were waiting for the promised Advocate; the one who was coming on the behalf of Jesus. the one who couldn't come unless Jesus ascended.

Suddenly, a sound, not the wind, but a sound of a violent wind, was heard. I don't know how violent a storm you have experienced, but one time I was camping, sleeping on the ground in a two person tent, when I was awakened with the sound of heavy rain... the wind was so strong it was as if the tent walls were being sucked into the middle of the tent. Then I heard the sound of a train. I was petrified.

This is what the sound of wind was like, filling the entire house where they were gathered, sitting together. With the sound what appeared to be divided tongues of flame appeared, and one rested on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.

In the 11th chapter of Genesis the Bible tells of all people speaking one language. Those people came upon a level piece of ground where they had everything needed to build a city. They decided to begin by building a tower with its top in the heavens, in order to "make a name for themselves". When God saw the tower he realized that nothing would be beyond them, so he called the heavenly host to go down to earth and "confuse the language so they would not understand one another's speech." Then the people were scattered abroad over the face of all the earth, and the building was abandoned.

Because the people of the earth were building for their own glory, not to glorify God, God took away their ability to communicate. Here, at Pentecost, with the Holy Spirit, God enabled the disciples to speak the languages of the people so that the Good News of Jesus Christ could be spread throughout the land. There were people from all over the country living in or visiting Jerusalem on that day. Each and every one of them heard in their own language what was being said. Those who believed would have spread it to the people of their home land, thus the beginning of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

But there were those who did not believe what the disciples were saying. They jeered at them, calling them drunk. Peter, the one who was always outspoken in kind of a foolish way, all of a sudden became eloquent in his speech as he defended them saying it was only 9 in the morning, they weren't drunk. Peter explained that the Spirit of God had come to all people as prophesied by Joel, and it was time for them to prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams. He spoke of the Day of the Lord when Jesus returns and all who call upon him will be saved. And the people listened.

You know, that's an art we seem to have lost these days. We are in conversation, but instead of really listening to what the other person, or people are saying, we are forming our answers. Or we disagree with them so vehemently that we refuse to listen to what the other person is saying. Sometimes we hear what they say, but we don't like it because it pushes a button, and we stop listening. Or we get angry and start an argument instead of paying attention to what is being said, really listening, to see if perhaps there may be some merit in the other person's point of view.

There used to be a time when people could actually discuss their opinions, not to try to change the other person's mind, but to gain understanding. When my siblings and my niece's

family were camping Labor Day weekend a couple of years ago, we were sitting around actually having a real discussion. And it felt good, because my older brother normally is a hot-head who won't tolerate any opinion that doesn't agree with his. But this was an honest to goodness conversation about listening to people, weighing what they were saying, doing the research to see if there were facts to back their point of view, and learning how to think for your self. There should be more of this type of listening.

It took me a long time to realize that just because I knew something it didn't mean everyone else knew as well. I realized this when a friend of mine was getting her doctorate degree. She kept submitting ideas for her dissertation thesis and they were rejected. Then she had a conversation with someone who truly wanted to help her. She was told that she didn't have a strong enough basis for her dissertation.... That she wasn't explaining with enough detail what she knew, it was as though she expected everyone to know what she knew. When I heard her tell that tale, I realized, I do that in everyday life! That makes it difficult for people to trust, and to follow what I'm saying because they don't have all the details... Just because I know something, I can't assume everyone knows.

But I wonder as I write this... is it because we are not glorifying God with our speech that God has taken away our ability to communicate with one another?

The disciples did not assume that everyone knew the good news of Jesus Christ. They used the new languages they had been gifted with to glorify God and spread a message that could be verified through the scriptures. The people listened. They were convinced that Jesus, who was crucified, is the Messiah and will return in glory, and all who call upon his name will be saved.

All glory be to God. Amen.