

One Language, a Pentecost sermon in response to Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21, and John 14:8-17, 25-27, by Rev. Scot McCachren at the First Presbyterian Church of East Hampton, June 9, 2019.

“In the beginning was the Word [the *logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word **was** God.”... So begins the Gospel of John, which continues... “All things came into **being** through him, and without him **not one thing** came into being.” And a few verses later... “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” +++... **The Logos... the Word... Jesus Christ.** +++ Greek philosophy was the dominant intellectual tradition when the gospels were written, and John’s prologue is the best reflection of it – especially Plato’s brand of *Idealism*:: the notion that Truth is ultimately an *ideal* – an abstraction – and the material world is but an incomplete expression of it. +++ What does that mean?... Well, think about encountering a particular thing in the world – say, your favorite tree. You can touch it – maybe there are a few scars on it where a limb came off... where it got struck by lightning. Maybe it’s getting old and some of the branches have no leaves... Well, that particular tree is just one imperfect physical reflection of “tree-ness”... **tree-ness** is the **ideal** tree that we all just understand somehow – it’s the basis we use to judge whether something we encounter in the world is, in fact, a manifestation of “Tree.” +++ [[I **hope** that makes sense... it’s about as far as I can go into Platonic Idealism in one sermon.]] +++ But **that’s** what John’s prologue is getting at about Jesus Christ. Before all time – before creation – the Logos – the Word – has been **the** “Divine Expression.” ... “All things came into **being** through him, and without him **not one thing** came into being.” **THE** Word is part of the cosmic order of the universe. +++ **When God began creating, Christ himself was blurted out of the Divine Mouth as the words, “Let there be Light.”** Christ – the Logos – was spoken out as pure creative force. +++ So when “the Word became flesh and lived among us,” everything truly turned upside down. **The ideal had taken physical form.** Meeting Jesus was like one day running into a tree that’s actually not just a physical manifestation – No – somehow – this one **IS** tree-ness – the one perfect essence of “tree” right here among all these imperfect, incomplete, broken, versions. You can touch it – climb it – rest in its shade. +++ The Logos – Jesus Christ – **IS** the perfect Word of God... The one Truth... The ONE LANGUAGE... **in the flesh.** +++ And we learn as the Gospel of John continues:: the further from Christ we wander – – the **less** we are able to understand him. As we stray further and further from God’s will, the Truth of the Logos – the ONE LANGUAGE of God – becomes lost to us.

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But what does this have to do with Pentecost?... Or **today’s** scripture readings, for that matter? +++ Well, the Tower of Babel and the Pentecost narratives both center on our relationship to **language** and the Word of God – and yet they are mirror images of one another. +++ In Genesis, it is a primeval time. In the previous chapter, Noah has just landed the ark and his descendants spread across the world. Everyone on earth still speaks the **same language** – but as they separate themselves from God, their unity through language is lost and confused, so they scatter to the corners of the world:: A unified language – one set of words – yet their ambition for worldly things cost them the ability to communicate, or even live together. +++ In Acts, the world is more complex. Devout Jews from “every nation under heaven” have gathered in Jerusalem and they speak many different languages. When the Holy Spirit invades the house where the disciples are gathered and they begin speaking in tongues – everyone in the crowd is caught up in it. When the Christians speak – **each person** understands as though it is in their own language. +++ **Separation** from God had broken the unity of the world – but now – through the sudden, dramatic, and promised appearance of the Holy Spirit – everything is turned on its head... **Unity in the Truth of Christ – the Word – Logos – the essence of God-ness, once again loose in the world...** +++ ...reunites all people with a **new** connection:: they are connected to each other, and to God, by Christ through the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

This is what Jesus had promised in today’s gospel reading. Philip is confused: “Lord, **show** us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” +++ Do you think we are still a lot like Philip? It’s hard to know when we have what we need – hard to accept that we **have** all we really need. Christ is **right there with** him, yet Philip still question how to know the Father. +++ “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me **has** seen the Father.’ ... ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, **whom the world cannot receive**, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.’” +++ **And all of that came to pass.** When Christ left, the Holy Spirit **did** come to take his place

as our leader... And,... again,... as Christ had told them, the **world did not** receive the Spirit itself:: In our Pentecost reading... – ...the devout Jews from every nation – **they** did not see the flames of fire – **they** did not hear the violent wind. +++ **What they heard were the words of the Apostles.** They heard – **and understood** – the people of the Church – a Church born that Pentecost day when the Spirit’s tongues of fire made the Apostles’ words clear to all the people of the world. +++ But yet... – I think we are still stuck like Philip had been... “Yeah I know we’ve got the **church** – I know we celebrate the **sacraments** – but do we really have what we need to **BE** the Body of Christ for this day and age – to speak on his behalf to this broken world??? +++ **The Answer – and the GOOD NEWS – is YES! +++ As the church of Jesus Christ – empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and every day since – YOU are the heirs to the Logos – the heirs to the ONE LANGUAGE – the eternal truth of Christ. You are connected to true GOD-NESS that exceeds all things in this physical world... And when you speak in his name – the world will understand!!**

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Pentecost goes beyond **Speaking**. It’s not just about us – it’s about the whole world:: the world receiving Christ **through** us. Pentecost is about **hearing** – it’s about learning to **listen** – and it’s about **understanding**. +++ Yes, Acts tells us the Spirit gave those gathered in the room the ability **to speak** unknown tongues – but the rest of the passage is **not about Talking**:: The crowd from all over the world is bewildered because each person hears these foreign tongues and **understand**. +++ +++ As we gather here today in red, proclaiming the Day of Pentecost, how prepared **are WE** for the Holy Spirit’s wild tongues of fire to rest upon us? How prepared **are WE** to cry out the words he puts into our mouths – opening ourselves to depths of truth we never knew before? How prepared **are WE** to listen and to understand the ONE LANGUAGE of Jesus Christ – the Logos – brought to our ears by the violent wind of the Holy Spirit and calling us **to get busy** as his hands and feet to nurse his hurting world. +++ Too often these days, we labor to build a tower to the heavens – with politics, economics, and privilege as our Babel – closing our ears to the cries of outsiders, the persistence of poverty, the impossible choices of those with no childcare... or healthcare... or hope. Too often, we break into our factions and tow a party’s line instead of listening and understanding each other’s point of view... Paying homage to ourselves and building that tower higher and higher... As we do so, the voice of Christ fades from our ears – we speak our **own** languages – and we wander away into our lands of solitude. +++ **But at Pentecost, the Spirit invites us to start over** – come back together from lands across the world – bring our many tongues:: then fall silent as the Holy Spirit reminds us of the ONE LANGUAGE of Christ – a language whose Truth we understand **whatever** words are used. +++

Pentecost is not just a Sunday on the church calendar each year. Pentecost **HAPPENS every** day – every moment you open yourself to see the Holy Spirit at work in the world – and in yourself. The Spirit is a link to Christ – the hand of God among us – stirring, calling, and reconciling our brokenness. +++ The Spirit is **your** Advocate – **your** guide – **your** leader – **your** friend. +++ So, this morning, I wonder... Are there obstacles in your life or the community around you where the Spirit is at work – in points of pain, perhaps – where the way forward is not clear? :: Relationships that cause you pain? ... Addiction or mental distress that give you no peace? ... The grief of loss? ... Agonizing over things you have no power to solve? ... +++ What is God telling you about it – not in so many words – but in the ONE LANGUAGE of Christ, through the Holy Spirit? Can you drop your defenses, listen through your grief, accept healing – and find a way forward? +++ Have you spent time doing nothing but quietly waiting and listening for the Spirit of God to move in your heart? If so, what was it like? Are you **open** to this kind of listening? How can you share it with others? +++

You have all you need! The Holy Spirit **comforts you** and offers peace with this world and with God... The Holy Spirit **brings us together** as the community of Christ... The Holy Spirit **activates** the Logos – the Word – in you... The Holy Spirit **empowers** you to bring the Truth of Christ to the world in the ONE LANGUAGE they **will** understand. +++ The language of our Creator... the language of the Lord.

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.