

May 19th: Speak

Traditionally, the Sunday of Pentecost marks the conclusion of the liturgical year—and the conclusion of our year-long sermon series. Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit fills the mouths of thousands of people, is a day when we are reminded that we too are part of a diverse, global mission that cannot be confined to one ethnic group, one language, one people, or one culture. Our theme for the past year has been “Love in Action,” and today we remember that this love that we have been entrusted with has no boundaries, no limits, and no exclusions. The love in action that we’ve been talking about, supported by the presence of the Holy Spirit, continues to echo throughout our collective history and through our daily lives—I hope you will hear the loving echo this morning.

Pentecost may be the ending of this cycle of stories, but it is just the beginning for us. It is our starting point as we contemplate how to continue sharing the message that has been placed on our hearts. And it is now our sacred privilege to be a new generation of people bearing God’s good news, so I invite you into a brief time of reflection as we meditate on how we might be able to participate in this holy calling this week.

Before we begin, let’s open our hearts with prayer.

God of the flame, you equipped your disciples to speak your good news to a crowd of every nation, you gave them words, power, and wisdom to speak the truth that our world needs to hear. You have now entrusted this mission to us, may we feel your presence with us now. May we be equipped, may we be empowered, may we be emboldened to be the source of hope, healing, and peace that our community longs for. May these thoughts and the meditations of all of our hearts lead us into love in action this week. Amen.

I was listening to an NPR podcast while on a walk this past week, and this particular episode was focused on our current economy and why so many people right now are struggling with a sense of despair. The hosts were talking

about how this feeling is pervasive, and in consumer surveys taken of the general population, we're seeing higher reported rates of despair than ever before—even higher than during the pandemic or the Great Recession, higher than during the Vietnam War, or other periods of instability and conflict.

And then I was scrolling Instagram one night before bed, and I watched this video by a creator I follow who was describing the hopelessness that she's been feeling over the past few weeks. She described a scene in her day where she was looking in on her children tucked into their beds, their little heads peeking out of the blankets, resting peacefully on their pillows with little hands under their chins—and how this was both similar and in contrast to an image she had seen on the news of a child in Gaza, whose own little head and little hands were peeking out from a building that had collapsed on top of them while they slept. She shared how these two mental pictures, burned into her brain, have caused immeasurable heartbreak and tears, as she tries to reconcile the world we desire to build for our children and the world that we actually have created.

And I don't think these podcast hosts or parents are alone.

I think if we were to ask our neighbors, or even our friends sitting next to us in the pews if they are feeling worried, or anxious, or unsettled, or fearful right now, the vast majority would respond with yes—they do feel overwhelmed by negative feelings at the moment. You might even feel the same way. I don't think this is just a result of negativity bias or our tendency as human beings to lack gratitude for what we do have—I think this despair is a very real and very valid response to all the mess that we find ourselves in.

In a way, I think this despair that many of us are feeling has done something to us beyond just this emotional response. I think despair of this depth has the ability to paralyze us—I think when we are dealing with situations of this magnitude, it has the ability to shock us into this state of immobilization. In the face of such suffering, we might feel frozen in place, unable to do or fix anything. In this state, we might tell ourselves, "things are not going to get any

better, so why even try?" We might rationalize, "there's nothing I can do to change things, so why bother?" We might look around and say, "I can't make a difference, I'm just one, small, ordinary person."

If this is how you are feeling this morning, or how you have felt recently, I want you to know that I've had some of the same thoughts—I've had my own moments of despair and frustration and hopelessness. But over the past week, as I re-read the story of Pentecost and reflected on this familiar narrative—I began to feel my despair lessen, and my hope began to grow again. I hope that as we reflect on this story together, the same will be true for you.

Following Jesus' ascension into heaven, his disciples were immediately thrust into positions of leadership—they were suddenly the authority on Jesus' teachings, and the ones empowered to continue his work of healing. In these early days of ministry, a lot was uncertain. As these new leaders grappled with this situation, they gathered together in Jerusalem—all the disciples in one place. It was still close to the time of Passover, so Jews from around the empire were still in the city and worshipping together.

Our text records that with a great gust of wind came upon these disciples, tongues of fire came to rest above each of their heads, and they were able to speak in tongues. Verse 4 says, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." And verse 6 continues, "When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken."

It might sound chaotic to us, to imagine this cacophony of voices, but the reality wasn't chaotic at all. In fact, these many languages, all spoken at once, create this kind of miraculous environment. As the disciples speak to the crowd in these various languages, more and more people are drawn in by the message that they were sharing. At the end of this chapter, we hear that over 3000 people were baptized that day, and that crowd began to meet daily and expand exponentially. And all that was possible, because these disciples began

to speak. This miracle of speech was the thing that drove thousands of people to be transformed on that day.

I think this tells us that our words have tremendous power.

More power than we think.

Our words, even simple, everyday ones, make an impact.

Our words, even when we are uncertain or afraid, are filled with potential for transformation.

Your words are an extraordinary tool, a gift that can be used for good—whether that's in your neighborhood or our nation.

And I think that's very good news for these current situations that we find ourselves in, or the feeling of being paralyzed by the weight of the world. Even if we feel immobilized, or stuck without a way forward, we can start with something as fundamental as our voice. We can start with speaking up, and speaking out.

You may not be able to speak to everyone, but there is someone you can speak to this week. You might not be able to get your Senator on the phone, but you might be able to call your local city councilperson. You probably won't end a war, but you can end a petty conflict that you're having with a friend or family member. You may not be able to speak on every topic with authority, but there's probably something that you are curious about or have some level of expertise—and the world is waiting for what you have to say.

You can speak about your own experiences, and that might bring hope to someone else. You can speak about your dreams for the future, and that might inspire someone else. You can speak about what you see on the news, or what is going on in your community, and that might spread awareness to someone else. You can speak about your anxieties or struggles, and that might allow someone to come alongside you with solidarity and comfort.

So as I wrap this up and send you out into the start of your week—I invite you to think about what God might be putting on your heart to say. What message has God filled you with to share? What fire has God given you to speak?

And when you do speak up or speak out this week, I hope you know that the right people will hear it, and the echoes will be endless.

Amen.