



## LAKESWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Katie Robb

May 23, 2010

### GETTING IT

#### Acts 2:1-21

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When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>"In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Teachers are tired this time of year.

Ok, maybe, I think, teachers are tired all year except summer and winter break.

They work hard and have to find ways to explain things THEY already know.

Kids can be horrible and parents can be, well...everything from aggressively overbearing and entitled to depressingly absent and uninvolved.

Teachers work hard.

But, from what I hear, there is one major thing that makes it all worth it.

Light Bulbs.

Light Bulb Moments, that is.

One teacher describes this phenomenon:

*"If you are a teacher you know what I am referring to.*

*That look a student gets when they suddenly and inexplicably realize that they get it.*

*That they have learned and mastered something new.*

*It's truly an electrifying experience.*

*That is what makes the meager salary and [bad] parking worth it.*

*That is why I am a teacher."*<sup>1</sup>

It seems there might be a lot to be said about language and light bulbs today...

*<sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."*

They began speaking in other languages.

Boom, as if just like that, my sermon were being spoken in a foreign language.

Not my own wobbly Spanish or French that I learned in school days.

Not even some piecing together of the loose academic understanding of Greek or Hebrew words I got in seminary.

(And scholars note, by the way, that this language is not to be confused with the ecstatic glossolalia, "speaking in tongues" spiritual language of the Corinthian church, which I can't do either. I'm Presbyterian.)

This is straight up instant foreign language knowledge.

As if, in some amazing way, I could suddenly speak something as unknown to me as Mandarin Chinese or Farsi.

Awesome.

And then, LIGHT BULB MOMENT:

Devout Jews with all kinds of native languages understood them!

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<sup>1</sup> From a blog entitled "Confessions of First Year Maestro" is about a first year teacher and his struggles in the classroom at <http://www.experienceproject.com/stories/Am-A-Teacher/126722>

Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and Mesopotamians,  
 Judeans and Cappadocians and Asians,  
 Phrygians and Egyptians and Romans and Cretans and Arabs Oh my.  
 They all GOT IT.

The Holy Spirit uses Language to create both difference and understanding all at once.  
 Understanding in the midst of difference.  
 At this point we might consider that what happened was as much a gift as a punishment...

Nevermind the tongues of fire,  
 This was a massive LIGHT BULB MOMENT.  
 And they were talking about GOD!  
 Do you know how hard it is to talk about GOD?  
 To understand language about God?  
 Just think TRINITY here people!  
 Three in one and one in three parts that are all the same part and...phew!

Barbara Brown Taylor, a priest, professor, and writer who in her life has said a lot about God,  
 has also said this about our language for God:

*"In the Upanishads, God is described as 'Thou Before Whom All Words Recoil.' This sounds right to me. Anything I say about God will be inadequate. No matter how hard I try to say something true about God, the reality of God will eclipse my best words. The only reality I can describe with any accuracy is my own limited experience of what I think may be God: the More, the Really Real, the Luminous Web That Holds Everything in Place.*

*Even then, there is a good chance that my words will serve as an impediment for those who hear them. If 'The Really Real' makes no sense to you, then you will have to find some way around that phrase before you can get on with your own description, which means that my speech about God has just done more to block your way than to open it. The only reason to accept such a risk is because most of us need to hear what other people say before we decide what to say about those same things ourselves."<sup>22</sup>*

New words.  
 Different words.  
 Faith made understandable.  
 Workable.  
 Gettable.

That is what the Spirit wants.  
 Different ways to talk about God such that different people can hear it.

Listen to these words, from various faith statements written by our confirmands this weekend:

"God is a word that fills me with exhilaration...."

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<sup>22</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, from [An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith](#). Harper One: New York. pg 7.

"When I sing is when I feel like there might truly be something like what people call God..."  
 "I think that God is the best person in the world..."  
 "God is ice cream on a hot day..."  
 "Jesus' loving warmth shines through glaciers in Antarctica..."  
 "Jesus' life and death have made me more aware of others' suffering..."  
 "I don't think that there was an actual date that something miraculous happened that triggered my trust in Jesus Christ, but somewhere in the past few years I have developed a strong trust that he will get me through anything that confronts me..."  
 "Church membership is important because it helps you thank God and Jesus for all the things they help you do..."  
 "To become part of something so huge is a really good feeling..."

New words.

Different words.

Faith made understandable.

Workable.

Gettable.

**Confirmation** happens on Pentecost – today – just after this sermon - for a reason.

It is a Light Bulb day – a day of getting it,

In which these youth are empowered to claim their faith,

The Holy Spirit, like a rush of wind, or tongue of fire, or even a still small voice,

We believe, stirs in them that they might be moved to use their gifts in the practice of ministry, here in this particular church called Lakewood Presbyterian.

But what I hope we teachers have done is opened paths for the Holy Spirit to move them toward their own language for God,

Empowered them not just to service but to understanding, to new words for the things they have heard before in church, words that they can truly believe, feel and know to the very core of their being.

Confirmation itself is a funky word and a strange thing we do in the church.

It is a great moment for these youth,

But should it be a one time deal?

This is no baptism.

It is an affirmation of baptismal vows.

A saying yes again to a faith they already had.

A claiming of promises made,

A commitment to the church.

Should that be a one time deal?

A pastor friend of mine has wished out loud to do adult confirmation classes.

I maybe, everyday, need to recommit myself to God's love and work in the world.

When is the last time you examined and confirmed your faith,

Checked in with the old language to see what still held meaning and what needed a little editing?

How do you experience God in your life and how are you going to be a member of Christ's Body?

Not how did you used to experience God, or how have you committed yourself to the church in the past?

NOW. Given all that is in your life NOW.

What would you say if you wrote a faith statement today?

What light bulb moments have you had?

Is a new language in order?

Language that might help somebody else GET IT?

May what these youth have done, inspire you to let the Spirit move.

That we all might better understand.

Amen and Amen.