

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Acts 2:1-21
Pentecost Sunday

The Power to Speak

There once was a church in need of a new pastor, the old one having reached that age when he could finally go out to pasture. They did their goodbyes well by him, serving up a \$10 a plate dinner in the church basement to add to his retirement fund. They sang, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" and told nice stories about him. They gave him a new set of golf clubs and golf lessons so that he could improve his golf game. And he went on his way.

Then they invoked section 6.4.13 of their By-Laws and started the process to look for a new pastor. The first meeting of the new search committee met in the parlor one evening soon after the pastor's departure. It was chaired by an enthusiastic woman who impressed upon the group that this was not going to be a picnic. In looking for a new pastor they were charting their church's destiny. God was depending on them to put all other agendas in their lives on hold and heaven help them if they didn't rise to the occasion. She was so determined that four members of the committee wanted to resign on the spot. So madam chair eased up just a bit. What she really meant to say to the call committee was that she hoped they would do their best by the great employment officer in the sky. Then they moved to the next item on the agenda and that was to consider, "What they wanted in a new pastor?"

There was excellent participation at that point. Every last person spoke with a voice of authority on the subject and the scribe for the evening noted all their points on the laptop computer until an image began to emerge. Then they all agreed to some modifications since neither Moses nor Jesus was available for call. Then, it was cookie time and, while refreshing themselves for the task at hand, some started talking about their former pastor. "You know, after all is said and done he really was a pretty good guy. But we took advantage of him. We let him carry our bucket. Whenever things needed doing, we left it up to him."

One by one the others voiced similar sentiments. And it was as if the heavens opened. Suddenly it came to them that they would never ever expect everything to come from their pastor again. They would take their responsibility from now on and take their part in giving direction to their church. And the more they talked about it, the more excited they became until their voices became like a rush of mighty wind filling the room.

Word of this great moment quickly spread to the entire congregation. And there was a great and most spontaneous "Amen!" to this new spirit. "Find us a pastor and things will be different this time," everyone said. And the search began.

Now, it was shortly after this that a group of concerned citizens asked the church to sign a petition to ask for an inquiry into the poor patient care that was being given to veteran outpatients at Walter Reed Hospital. It was rumored that patients who had longer-term health care needs, especially those who were disabled from wounds suffered during active combat duty, could not get the care they needed. It was a matter of justice they said, human rights, and they thought the church would naturally want to say something about that. So the church held a meeting about it and discussed the matter at great length. Then someone said, "Let's table the matter for now until the new pastor gets here. Let him or her decide."

One of the things to notice about the sudden out-pouring of God's grace on the day of Pentecost is that it was a very inclusive moment. Unlike other moments in the history of God's powerful interventions in human history - like Jesus' baptism or his transfiguration - where only a few people were witnesses of what happened, everyone was included at Pentecost. The tongues of fire come to rest upon each and every one of the disciples who were gathered together, and a moment later the crowd gathered outside the house comes surging forward because...each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. What happened at Pentecost was no mystical, inner, personal experience of the Spirit. It was an outpouring of God's energy that touched every life that was present.

Even Peter. You remember Peter. Like everybody else, he ran away into the darkness. "Weren't you with that group from Galilee?" somebody asked him outside of Herod's palace on that awful night and Peter couldn't deny Jesus fast enough. He simply could not find it in himself to admit that he even knew Jesus. On the day of Pentecost Peter was out in front of everybody speaking to a crowd of people! The one who denied having known Jesus - preaching about Jesus to a crowd in Jerusalem!

Whether or not it was the best sermon he ever preached, it certainly seems to have been one of the most effective. It only lasted about three minutes, according to Luke; but about three thousand people were saved that day. The Holy Spirit was given to a very ordinary man and it turned him into a public speaker just like that.

Thirty-four years ago in 1974 I decided to go into the ministry. I remember very clearly going to my Father and telling him what I wanted to do. He certainly wasn't pleased by my decision. He told me that I would not be able to preach very well because no one in my family was very good at public speaking. He also said that He didn't think that I had the skills needed to be a pastor. And then he finally said to me, by the way you will never make any money. I didn't really take these things as criticism, I understood that my father had been very close to several pastors during his lifetime and he knew first-hand that they had a fairly difficult job and a pretty difficult life. Once I got half way through seminary I realized that I must do my part but it is really the Holy Spirit who does most of the work.

And if I can do it, you can do it. That's got to be one of the most important lessons of Pentecost. If people like me can do it, people like Peter, then people like you can do it too. You don't have to stand up front in church every Sunday and you certainly don't have to be a Pastor. You might be on the phone to somebody who is down on their luck. What on earth do you say to

someone like that? It's a scary thing, isn't it? But, The spirit of the Lord... is upon me to bring good news to the oppressed...

Or you find out somebody's marriage has just come to an end. What possible comfort could you offer somebody like that. The Spirit of the Lord ... is upon me... to bind up the broken-hearted...

Or somebody who thinks she has nobody finds also that she has nowhere to turn. The Spirit of the Lord... is upon me ... to proclaim liberty to captives...

That's what Pentecost is about as much as it is about anybody speaking from a pulpit. It's the very public speech ordinary people like you and me find ourselves giving to others, because even though we didn't know how we were going to do it, the Holy Spirit descends and gives us the power to speak. It is what the prophet Joel meant when he said that in former days, God's word was given only to prophets, a few charismatic, leader types who managed to speak up for God. But a day would come God said, "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." Everybody gets to speak up for God; because church is the place where the power to speak belongs, not just to a few, but to all.