

Sermon – *In the Footsteps of the Apostles – Pentecost*

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Athelstone Uniting Church #68

9 June 2019

Text: Acts 2:1-21 NIV

Let's pray...

Risen Lord Jesus

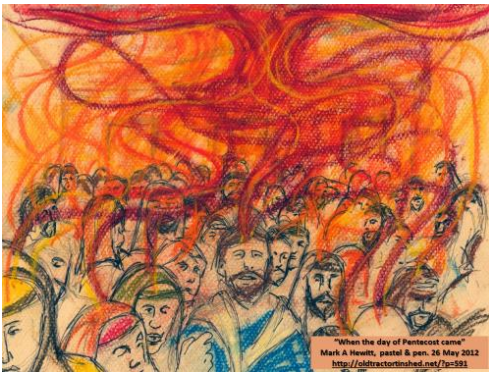
Draw near.. as we lean into you..

Open our eyes to see

Open our ears to hear

your Word to us this morning. Amen.

Pentecost



This morning we join the church around the world as we celebrate Pentecost.

In Acts 2, we hear how the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Pentecost, the day when Jesus' promise was fulfilled:

Jesus had instructed the apostles to wait for the gift God had promised – baptism with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1, we are reminded that Jesus promised that the apostles will receive power when the Spirit comes on them; and they will be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:4–8)

Pentecost, the day the prophet Joel had dreamed of:

That every person, young and old, man and woman, can have the Spirit.

Pentecost, the day when all believers were empowered:

...with the Holy Spirit coming like the roar of a violent wind and like tongues of fire.

Pentecost, the day when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The words associated with the Holy Spirit in Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible can be translated as breath, air, wind, or storm.

We heard about the roar of the wind of the Spirit entering the room.

We also associate the Spirit with fire.

Through fire, we picture a Holy Spirit who cleanses, purifies, warms, brings light... A thing of beauty, power, mystery. Holy Spirit, the fire of love and life¹ Enlivening, invigorating, challenging, inspiring, breathing the breath of creativity and joy into our lives.

When we are blessed with the Holy Spirit, we experience the same power that transformed the apostles during Pentecost, a fire that awakens the countless gifts that have been given to us, helping us to become people, fully alive. ²

The Holy Spirit helps each of us as we live our lives as Christ's disciples.

Explain image

Reverend Mark Hewitt, my colleague at The Corner Uniting Church, sketched this image a few years ago – I think it captures well those images of fire and wind swirling around the disciples –the dance of the Spirit!

Creative energy

The Spirit brings about creative energy:

Psalm 104, verse 30 says:

When you send your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

or in the New Living Translation:

When you give them your breath, life is created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

¹ Samuel Rayan, *Renew the face of the Earth* (Delhi: Media House, 1998)

²Trisha Watts and Gabrielle Lord. *Sanctuary: where Heaven touches Earth*. (Brookvale, NSW: Willow Publishing, 2005.)

“.. In our story from the Acts of the Apostles, I read that, it must have felt like creation all over again, with wind and fire, and something new bursting forth. Then there was the amazing experience of speaking in one language yet being understood by people of many different languages and lands, the names of which represented the known world at that time. In that moment, all the people - despite their differences - were one in their hearing, if not their understanding of the deeper meaning of what they heard. Fire, wind, and humble Galileans speaking persuasively in many tongues were dramatic signs that God was doing a new thing that would transform the lives of all those present, and far beyond, in time and place.”³

Language

Language is so important.

I want to read to you something that happened to Professor Amy Oden – and if you have travelled, you may have shared a similar experience:

She says:

It happened on the subway platform in Moscow.

I’d been there for a week and I don’t speak Russian or understand it. For several days, my ears had been in a sea of gibberish, random sounds that I couldn’t understand. Then, in an instant of clarity, I heard English from the other end of the platform. It was like a beam of light, piercing through all other sounds, straight to my ear. American English, no less. My native language. It was a homing beacon, sharpening my senses to its signal. I felt every molecule in my body relax as I focused on the voice and understood the words. It felt like coming home.

Have you ever had that experience?

I’ve had something similar when I visited Europe a few years ago – like Amy, my ears had been in a sea of gibberish, with random sounds I didn’t understand. Part of my travels were with my Mother and my Aunty – I remember how much I craved hearing them speak English to me – for me, there was a sense of coming home when I heard it.

Perhaps some of you who speak English as a second language, crave hearing your first language – your heart language – being spoken?

³ Rev Kate Matthews, Dean of Amistad Chapel of the United Church of Christ in Ohio From Kathryn Matthew’s weekly email: Sermon Seeds.

In the Pentecost story, we see this happening with the disciples being empowered to speak many languages not their own. And not just any languages. The Spirit empowered them specifically to speak the languages of the “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” who were gathered there in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival.

Just imagine them hearing their mother tongues spoken for perhaps the first time in weeks or for the immigrants.. years! Did each have that sense of coming home?⁴

Language is so important.

International year of indigenous languages

Languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as an accumulation of each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory. But despite their immense value, languages around the world continue to disappear at an alarming rate.



With this in mind, the United Nations declared 2019 The Year of Indigenous Languages in order to raise awareness of them, not only to benefit the people who speak these languages, but also for others to appreciate the important contribution they make to our world's rich cultural diversity.



Did you know that

There are **7 thousand** Languages spoken worldwide

⁴ Amy Oden, posted in Working Preacher

370 million Indigenous people in the world

90 countries With indigenous communities

5 thousand Different indigenous cultures

And **2680 languages** In danger!

It is through language that we communicate with the world, define our identity, express our history and culture, learn, defend our human rights and participate in all aspects of society, to name but a few. Through language, people preserve their community's history, customs and traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking, meaning and expression. They also use it to construct their future.

Language is pivotal in the areas of human rights protection, good governance, peace building, reconciliation, and sustainable development.⁵

Data from the 2016 census⁶ show what we already know:

Australia is a fast changing, ever-expanding, culturally diverse nation.

In communities across the country, there is an increasing variety in terms of country of birth, languages spoken, whether people are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and religious affiliation (or secular beliefs).

Two thirds of the Australian population were born in Australia. Nearly half of Australians had either been born overseas (first generation Australian) or one or both parents had been born overseas (second generation Australian).

In 2016, there were over 300 separately identified languages spoken in Australian homes. More than one-fifth of Australians spoke a language other than English at home. After English, the next most common languages spoken at home were Mandarin, Arabic, Cantonese, and Vietnamese.

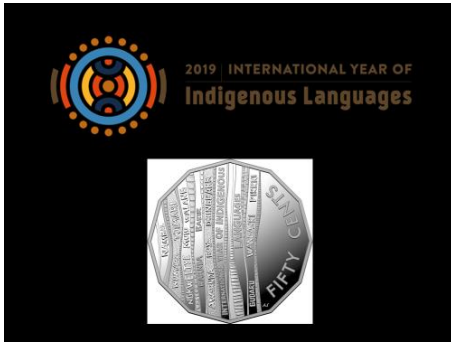
It is estimated that there were originally around 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Now only around 120 are still spoken. Of these, approximately 90 per cent are endangered.

In 2016, 53 people were recorded as speaking the Kurna language – and they all spoke it as their second language. The last person to speak Kurna as their first or heart language passed away in 1929

⁵ <https://en.iyil2019.org/>

⁶ From <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>

In the International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019, Australian Indigenous communities are working specifically to maintain and revitalise their languages



You might have seen the special 50 cent coin that has been released to recognise and celebrate the importance of Australia's indigenous languages to our national heritage?

The coin's design was created in consultation with 14 Indigenous language groups from around Australia, including the Kurna people of Adelaide. The coin features 14 different languages in its design, all stating the word 'coin' or 'money'.

Craig Ritchie from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies said that remaining connected to language strengthens wellbeing and self-esteem in Indigenous communities.

'Indigenous languages carry more meaning than the words themselves, so too does currency carry meaning beyond its monetary value,' he said.

'The release of these coins is another milestone in recognising the diverse cultures that shape our national story of over 60,000 years,' he said.⁷

This year, I have seen Joy and Bruce actively living out reconciliation by learning and teaching the Kurna language to our Stay and Play families.

As you may have noticed in the newsletter, the International Year of Indigenous Languages is the overarching theme for our playgroup and each week, Joy learns new words and teaches us all! A wonderful example of how we can walk alongside our indigenous brothers and sisters, helping them revive their language which is so important!

⁷ From <<https://www.indigenous.gov.au/news-and-media/stories/new-coin-celebrate-year-indigenous-languages>>



Going back to the day of Pentecost..

Those who experienced the blessing of the Holy Spirit that day were not necessarily the disciples – it was all the people gathered there in Jerusalem from many nations who heard their languages spoken. They heard God being praised in languages they understood. Languages that felt like home to them.

God's gift reached outward to those *outside* of the immediate circle of Jesus' disciples. The Spirit empowers us to connect with *others*.

As we think of Jesus' call on us as disciples today...

What language would you speak in your missional location, wherever you find yourself engaging with others, if you were filled with the Holy Spirit? / or as you *are* filled with the Spirit?!

How are those in your family or friendship groups or workplace or place of study hearing their mother tongue and being welcomed home?

How are those in our community hearing their mother tongue and being welcomed home?

Consider the language of those you interact with:

Is it a specific language like English, or Chinese, or Indian,,, spoken in our surrounding neighbourhood?

Or might it be a different form of communication, like emojis, texting or digital images?

Or perhaps the language of those outside your circle of Jesus followers is the language of science or music.

Or perhaps the language of wellbeing?

Or perhaps it is a particular spiritual dialect, a language of the heart that speaks deeply into people's lives?

Or perhaps it is the non verbal language of service and care?

What are the languages we are called to speak to today, in the power of the Spirit?

Can we ask the Holy Spirit to gift us with these languages?⁸

Praise be to our God who makes all things new through the Spirit!

From mike

Or as Mike O'Connell has shared with me:

Say with a rolling speech. All the best

Liptimapin nem blong gutpla God blong yumi⁹

Which means,

Praise be to our God

in Tok Pigin (PNG formal common language).....

Amen

Later in Acts 2, after Peter had explained what was happening, it says that three thousand were added to their number that day! That's a lot of people, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, praising God!

Let's join in with the thousands of voices and sing...

⁸ Amy Oden, posted in Working Preacher

⁹ Cross translation would be.....

Lift up name be wonderful God belong us.