

Communication: What a Miracle!

The word 'Pentecost' literally means "the fiftieth day" after Passover, the Jewish festival that commemorates God's deliverance of His people from Egypt.

Pentecost is historically related to the Jewish harvest festival, which celebrates God giving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai fifty days after the Exodus.

But for Christians, Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus as described in today's text, Acts 2.

We celebrate Pentecost because that's the day when we, the Christian community, blossomed from a few dozen hard-core followers of Christ into a Spirit-led movement that swept the world. We celebrate because the same Spirit that was working on the day of Pentecost 2000 years ago, is still working today in people's lives around the world, and in this church. We celebrate because the Jesus who kept his promise that his followers were going to be baptized with the Spirit, is still our teacher, friend and leader, inspiring all of us to continue to build the kingdom of God. We celebrate because God is still pouring out Her boundless love and compassion to all of Her children, even in times of difficulty and loss.

When we look at the apostles and other followers of Jesus, we can imagine how they experienced the transforming Spirit. According to Acts, after His resurrection Jesus presented himself alive to his disciples by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered his followers not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the Holy Spirit. Some of them, still expecting Jesus to perform some radical regime change, asked, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" But He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So the disciples were waiting as Jesus had instructed, waiting for exactly what Jesus had promised them; the power of the Holy Spirit, to be witnesses of Jesus to the world. Together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people,

all constantly devoting themselves to prayer. For about ten days, after the Ascension and until the day of Pentecost, they just focused on prayer: listening to God, remembering what their leader had done and said, trusting in His promise, and waiting for the Spirit. That's all they could do; that's all they had to do.

Listening and waiting have always been undervalued conversational skills, but without them, communication is not possible. Imagine a conversation where both people speak simultaneously -it would be impossible for them to understand each other. When we communicate with one another, we take turns speaking and listening. Notice that at Pentecost, there were not only speakers but also listeners. When the people in the upper room were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, the crowd outside, people from every nation under heaven, were surprised because everyone heard about God's powerful works in his or her own language.

The miracle wasn't so much the gift of speaking in strange languages, but the gift of communication – the speakers and the listeners could communicate with each other through the help of the Spirit. The followers, who had spent so much time in listening and waiting, could now speak effectively about all the wonderful things God had done. The communication, which was started between God and the people in the upper room, now continued between the people in the upper room and the people outside, in the street.

Communication is a miracle, because it brings change. We can see how the disciples were changed after their communication with God, and we can also see how the crowd was changed after their communication with the disciples. The Bible says that on that day about three thousand believed Peter's message and were baptized. Of course, I think not all of the crowd were changed. Some of them sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.' That's a part of our reality. I mean even if we participate in the same conversation, speaking the same language, everybody understands differently because we all are different. So the question is what makes good communication.

If you have ever had a good, deep and true conversation with someone in your life, you know how powerful it is to listen and to be listened to. Listening brings

understanding, and understanding brings peace and healing. It's been a great year since I moved to Ladysmith. It's still amazing that you and I actually have been communicating considering that I didn't speak English in Korea. When I started my ministry here, I thought that communication would be a challenge for both of us. I can't speak English as fluently as a native speaker, but I can be a good listener. And if I am a good listener, you and I can still communicate with each other, because everyone needs a listener. Of course sometimes I don't understand what you say, but I am trying to understand you with all of my heart. My Korean friends often ask me how I can communicate with you, and how I can preach my sermon in English when it is not my first language, and I say to them that truly, I can only do it with the grace of God and the help of the Spirit. I always believe that I am ministering not only through my language but with my heart. Here my language challenge becomes my strength because I know that I can never use words as a barrier to communication or as a way to distance myself from others; I must speak plainly, from the heart, and listen with my heart to whatever you have to say. There are always people who pride themselves on being good speakers, but even the best speaker needs a counterpart of good listeners.

I think so does God. God needs good listeners as God is a good listener for each one of us. We usually spend a lot of time speaking, and think that there is little time to listen. So let's keep balance. Take more time to listen to God and your family and friends. Let's listen to one another. Let us remember that Pentecost was possible not because there were willing speakers but because there were so many listeners. Peter affirmed that the event was a fulfilment of the words of the Prophet Joel, "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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy." But who is listening? Who is seeing their new vision? Who is sharing their dream? Follow the spirit of Pentecost, and let the Spirit be poured upon your listening ears.