

On the Day of Pentecost we celebrate the deep longing of God to be with us, and for us to be with each other. The Jews from all the different nations surrounding Jerusalem heard the apostles speaking in their own language. This is not just meant to be a sign of God's power, or to show that the apostles, because they were special, had plugged into a miraculous source. The ability of the apostles to proclaim God in different languages is a sign of God's desire to reach out, to connect with those who were far off, so that they could hear the story of God's love for themselves. This first gift of tongues shows us a God who meets us where we are, and doesn't expect us to go through any kind of cultural circumcision to find faith.

Paul's writing to the church in Corinth develops this theme, saying that every gift of the Spirit within the community of the church is given 'for the common good.' Whatever work of the Spirit takes place in us, and in the church, is meant to move people closer to each other, and to make the circle of invitation around God's table wider and more welcoming.

God is always calling people, because of God's great love. God is still calling even now, with an irresistible desire to draw all people into loving relationship. And yet, human nature being what it is, we like to cluster into groups that look and think and sound the same as each other. And then we take the Spirit's gifts and use them to make our circle, our tribe, feel special and strong. But the first thing that the Spirit of Christ caused the disciples to do was to speak in languages that were not their own, to reach out into a world that needed to hear.

What does it mean for people to hear the gospel in their own language today? Sometimes, it literally means just that. The freedom to sing and speak and hear the words of God's liberating love in your mother tongue. This is something we can continue to explore more of here at St John's. But also, 'language' isn't just words or speech. We also need to consider...how does the church feel welcoming for certain kinds of people, but not others? What cultures and sub-cultures, what lifestyles and beliefs, what kinds of backgrounds and life experiences might make some people unable to hear us when we talk in our holy circle about the love of God? This depends a bit on who is most visible, who gets heard, and who is seen to be most valued within our community.

God's Spirit is for everyone, and that means it takes a whole community, with every gift, and every person's unique self, to share God's love with those around us. If, say, God only gave the Spirit to one person in each community, then that community would only ever attract and really welcome and include people that looked and sounded like that one person. For others to hear the gospel of grace in their own language, we each need to learn to speak the gospel of grace as we have experienced it in our own lives.

And this is the tricky bit. Because we might have been led to believe that there's one right message, or that there's something called "Christian truth", which is separate from us – all packaged and sealed up as a complete thing that first we need to understand, and then we need to get right, and then we need to persuade other people to believe.

That's not how it is at all. There is only one place, only one way you can know and experience God's Spirit, and only one ground from which you can share God with others. And that's from inside you. From within your story, your life, with all its confusion and difficulty and struggle.

Jesus cried out to the people 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and drink...Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.' The Greek word that's been translated 'heart' here, is actually 'belly.' The believer's *belly*, our gut, our deepest, most visceral experience, that is the place from which the Spirit flows within us.

The Holy Spirit is often imaged as falling, or descending on someone for a moment, and then going back to being 'up there', away from us again. Sometimes that's how we call on the Spirit in our worship. Those images are okay, but they're limited, because they leave out what we know about the Spirit dwelling within us, praying, groaning, feeling, nudging and calling within us. The Spirit is a spring of living water that rises within us, and is always there. There is no moment when God's Spirit is not active and at work inside us. There are only times when we are inattentive, blocked, or unable to recognise what that activity is. A clogged spring is forced to flow underground, but the water doesn't stop. When the blockage is cleared, the spring rises up to quench thirst again. And not only our thirst, but the thirst of others.

Because nothing that the Spirit does in us or for us is meant for ourselves alone. The Spirit present with each one of us is meant to help us reach out with love to others. And only you can share from your inner self. Only you know the story of how and where the Spirit is at work in your heart. Nobody else can walk in your shoes the way you do, and it's the way you walk in your shoes that will call to someone else who needs to know how to live their own life with grace and freedom.

The Gospel of Thomas is an early collection of Jesus' teachings that wasn't included in the Scriptures as we have them today. It is full of wisdom. There's a line in it that says: 'If you bring forth what is within you, what is within you will save you.' And I would add this. If you bring forth what is within you, what is within you will save others also.

So as we open ourselves to the refreshing and renewing of God's Spirit in us this morning, can I encourage us to cultivate the flow of the Spirit that is deep within our own bellies. To ask God to gently loosen the beliefs, fears or sins that are like scar tissue clogging the living water. To try ways of praying that open space for the Spirit praying deep within us.

God is not far away, or outside of you. You don't need to find anything more, or different to know the Christ who indwells you. God is already speaking your language, the language of your own heart. None of us needs to force ourselves into anyone else's shape, or learn anyone else's tongue, because God has sent God's Spirit to dwell in us. Thanks be to God. Vi'ia le Ali'i.