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CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

## Weekly Sermon

### Pentecost • Acts 2 & John 15 Low Water

We often have trouble with hearing and understanding. Even when we can hear... we may not be listening... especially if we think we know what is being said...

Those of you with a few miles on you will remember Walter Cronkite... those of you who don't can Google the name! I grew up with Walter... the most trusted name in network news... the voice of truth and reason. If Walter said it... it must be right. There is a marvelous story told about Walter and his wife, Betsy. Walter was a sailor... and after all those years anchoring the CBS evening news... was well known to most of America.

Walter died in 2009... His wife in 2005... so this story goes back a few years. The exact number really isn't important. One day Walter and Betsy were out on the boat... they were heading into the harbor... Cronkite on deck steering the boat when he saw a man on shore waving and shouting to him, "Hellooooo Walter." Cronkite smiled, waved back to the man, and continued on his course. The man waved with more animation... and yelled louder... "Hell-looooo Walter." Walter smiled, waved back and said over his shoulder to Betsy, "That man is really quite a fan, isn't he? I mean, really, "Helloooooo Walter. I heard him the first time."

Betsy leaned forward and told Walter, "I believe he is saying "low water" dear... Cronkite narrowly avoided the sandbar in front of them. Sometimes we listen, but we don't hear... sometimes we hear, but we don't listen.

The Book of Acts is deliciously ambiguous in how the day of Pentecost is described. Is this a miracle of hearing... a miracle of speaking... a bunch of guys who found new wine? Verse four places the emphasis upon speaking. Tongues of fire lick the heads of the disciples and viola! They are endowed with supernatural ability to speak languages they do not know. Sort of the Tower of Babel in reverse. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

Yet only two verses later, the emphasis is not placed upon speaking... but upon hearing. Apparently the crowd misses the tongues of fire, but catches the noise of the "rush of wind." They know the disciples are from Galilee... but yet they hear in their own language... and more languages than there are speakers to speak. "... The crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each."

Well, inquiring minds want to know. Is the miracle that I - who do not know French - suddenly begin preaching in French? Or- is the miracle that I continue to speak in English and you hear French? How does it work? Inquiring minds want to know...

Maybe - the real miracle is less about mechanics... than it is about understanding? Perhaps the answer to the working of the Spirit lies less in how... and more in whom - and where - and why. Perhaps the real miracle is simply that God is present and active in the world... regardless of whether we have an explanation or not. Perhaps our attempt at understanding simply gets in the way of the event itself.

At the end of the Pentecost day... the point isn't the disciples and their enhanced language skills... or the sudden ability of the crowds to decipher strange new speaking. The amazing thing is the working of the Spirit... uncontrollable... uncontainable... unexplainable. I don't think it is accidental that the Acts account is ambiguous. There is power and mystery in the working of the Spirit... and we are not supposed to have a ready explanation for it. Not our purview... not our place... not our purpose.

Jesus told the disciples that the Spirit was coming. When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth..." The disciples, standing in the presence of Jesus... having traveled with him... eaten with him... learned from him and lived with him... still had more to learn. They did not have a complete answer book. The way it had always been done was going to change.

The Spirit will guide you into all truth... you will arrive at a point and place where you are not now. More will be revealed... changes will be made... and the Spirit will be leading... thanks be to God. The way that it has been is not the way that it will always be. We will change and grow into the future where the Spirit leads.

As we listen for the teaching of the Spirit... as we hear the voice of the risen Christ continuing to speak in and through the Spirit... we avoid the low water in front of us when we don't prejudge what we think we know... when we don't spend our time trying to force God to fit into our preconceived notions and when and how and where. The Spirit is wild and unexpected... sometimes speaking French... Sometimes Hindi... but always the language of love... the language of grace.

You think the disciples on the cusp of being apostles were a little uncertain as they stood together on that first Pentecost? I imagine so. But they really didn't have time to debate how the Spirit was working... they were focused on whom and where and why. The who and where were gathered in front of them... people hungry to hear and receive - right here and right now. The why was also easy - because the Spirit was in charge.

Not much has changed from that day to ours... people are hungry to hear and receive... right here and right now. The Spirit remains in charge... leading us to a future under God's control. We do not have to understand how... we follow because of who... Jesus Christ and the advocate whom he sent to be our companion and guide.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.