

“Spirit”

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens
Senior Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 • Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

A Pentecost Sunday communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, May 15, 2016, dedicated to the memory of Dr. Vic Campbell, to the birth of Bennett Emelia Rowley, to the Holy Spirit alive in our lives and always to the Glory of God!

“Spirit”

Acts 2:1-21

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“Shema Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad.” How many times had Peter heard these words? How many times had he spoken them? As a Jew these words rolled off his tongue. They sang in his soul. They burst from his breath. They were the essence of his faith. “Hear O Israel. The Lord is our God. The Lord is One.” “Shema Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad.”

Fifty days after Jesus Christ rose from the dead, Peter was gathered with the other 120 who called themselves “the Way” and their EARS were opened and they heard the truth for the first time. The truth came through like a mighty wind, blowing across the mountaintops from the desert to the west. The truth blew through and they heard it. Tongues of fire, powerful and true, touched their lips and they began to speak in many different languages and they HEARD one another. They heard God’s still small voice speaking to them and through them. They not only listened. They heard.

The miracle of Pentecost is not so much about Speaking in tongues. The miracle of Pentecost is about Hearing the tongues that are speaking. Listen carefully with me. “Each one Heard them speaking in his own language” (vs. 6). “How is it that we hear?” (vs. 8). “We hear them telling in their own tongues the mighty works of God.” (vs. 11). “Give ear to my words.” (vs. 14). Fifty days after Jesus is Risen from the dead people hear one another. And they hear what God is saying through the apostles. With this hope is born. The hearing of the Word of God through Jesus will have a chance. It will go out to the whole world and AT LEAST be heard.

Without a doubt, the most important six words of Judaism are found in the “Shema” – which means “HEAR.” It is the greatest commandment: “Shema Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad.” Now on the first day of the church’s story, God’s tune doesn’t change as God sings to the people once again appealing for them to hear.

Pentecost is almost like the reversal of Babel. You remember Babel. It is the story of humankind trying to build a tower to the heavens. It is the first prideful exertion of humankind to be God. As the tower goes up and narcissistic and egotistical leaders exert their control and power over people, the people lose their ability to communicate. They fail to hear one another over the babel of the builders. Perhaps this is a story of the first Trump Tower.

On Pentecost – Babel in Reverse – heaven comes down to earth. Instead of prideful proclamations going up, the gentle touch of the dove’s wing, the tongues of fire which touched the tongue of Isaiah long before they reappeared and touched the tongues of the 3,000 come down. The languages do not all become one language- that is the conformity of Babel. Rather, the many languages are understood.

I have been wrapped up in recent months with hearing one voice calling to me over all the other voices in my life. The **voice I hear doesn't have diction as I understand it. It doesn't** have words in a language to can untangle. This voice is able to modulate, express and communicate feeling, tone, sound, laughter and personal needs. A few words have formed, but there hearing is imperative to understanding this voice speaking in its language of love. Of course – you might guess – this is the voice of my grandson Benton. He has a number of hand signals he uses when eating and playing. **“More” and “All done.”** The other day, he made a joke – which he thought was really funny. **We were playing and he gave me “the all done”** hand signal – (all done signal) - and then he burst out laughing. He clearly was not all done. **He had “played” me.** He thought he was funny. He was! With his 10-month old sense of humor, he had communicated laughter and love. I got it. We kept playing. The Spirit was alive between us. My heart and my ears had been touched by tongues of fire. I got it!

At Pentecost the languages remain colorfully different. So, the question of the Spirit is – how can we hear and understand each other? **How can we “Shema?”** For when we hear God – we hear one another and become one.

I look at the cacophony of sound in our times and I worry on this Pentecost Sunday that we hear and speak more and more like “Babblers” and less and less like Pentecost people. We talk on and on and listen less and less. In the politics of our times – our world is rocked more and more by Babblers whose cruel words and actions against women, people of color, Muslims, Lesbians, Gays Bisexual and Transgender and Questioning persons tears at the heart of humanity. And the babblers do this babbling with no sense of the danger of destroying other human beings. It is another form of 21st Century American terrorism. Do we hear and feel the impact of this Spiritless babbling? How does this change us? How are we drawn into the crossfire of this babbling? How do we become more like this through the cruelty we hear? Our souls can erode if we follow babblers and time and energy to their breath and destructive words and forsake the Pentecost spirit which we have been called to follow.

I recently had an experience which opened my ears. I was told I was not listening to someone. As I live into our text today, I am convinced that my friend was right. I **wasn't listening and certainly wasn't hearing the person's cries.**

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever failed to really hear what someone is saying? Perhaps it because they talk so

much you have stopped listening. Perhaps you have wax in your ears. I had a wise teacher say years ago that people in distress will repeat themselves longer and louder until they feel heard. How often have you failed to hear another person? How often have their words failed to penetrate your heart? On the other hand, how often have you walked in a room with breath on your lips and an agenda in your heart and just started unloading? Never really stopping to listen and hear, the room becomes silent. Our words are the only thing in the spewing in the atmosphere of sound and meaning. And we cannot hear **because we aren't giving space and time for hearing.** I ask each of us to self-examine our behaviors on this one.

In our faith story it took 50 days of a few resurrection appearances, coupled with lots of prayer, fear and confusion to get from Easter to Pentecost. It took Fifty days of seeing Jesus, eating on the beach with him and also being locked in rooms, hidden, cowering, and babbling to get to this day. We can relate to this. Some of us have spent 50 years or more praying, wondering, hiding, cowering, feeling fear and distress. We have spent – in essence – **a lifetime NOT HEARING God's voice** speaking, not hearing the voices of others close to us speaking, crying and even singing.

Today is our day to get a HEARING with God. In his book, Here and Now: Life in the Spirit, Henri Nouwen writes,

Any dance of celebration must weave both the sorrows and the blessings into a joyful step... To heal is to let the Holy Spirit call me to dance, to believe again, even amid my pain, that God will orchestrate and guide my life. <<http://www.azquotes.com/quote/1210207>>

Today receive the blessing and healing of Pentecost. HEAR and be healed. Hear what God is saying in different tongues, different voices, in different people. Hear what God tells us in Farsi, Spanish, German and English. Please, listen carefully today. But, more than listening, Hear - “**Shema.**” We are Pentecost people. We are a Spirit shaped church. So, let us truly “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.”

SHEMA. (sign language for all done – laugh).

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