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Have you ever been in a situation in which a language barrier made communication frustrating and perhaps impossible? I have the privilege of traveling a great deal, and I have encountered all kinds of challenges when I could not understand the native language of the place I was visiting – missed trains, food coming that was completely different from what I expected, taxis taking me to the wrong place. But by far the most frustrating experience of a language barrier came in my hometown of Bowling Green, KY. Now Bowling Green was not exactly a hotspot of international diversity, but when I was in seventh grade, a Vietnamese girl named Nyach Nyungh came to my school and joined a small algebra class that I was in. The teacher assigned me to be her partner, and it was the beginning of an awkward friendship. Poor Nyach knew no English, and I, of course, knew no Vietnamese. Middle school is scary enough, and I could not imagine how hard it was for her to navigate when she couldn't understand any of what was being said. I was desperate to show her the ropes, to explain the intricacies of where to sit in the cafeteria and how to avoid the halls where the fights usually broke out. And I wanted to know more about her – what had brought her family to Bowling Green of all places and what Vietnam was like. But our communication was mostly limited to frantic gestures. The exception to this was math. In algebra class, we could share a common language of numbers and x's and y's. Solving problems together was all the more gratifying because of the language barrier that existed the rest of the time.

I was reminded of Nyach when I spent some time thinking about our Pentecost reading from Acts. The disciples have come together to worship in Jerusalem. They've been through a lot – the death and resurrection of Jesus, followed by his ascension. We can imagine that they are bit disheveled and bewildered about what to do next, how to follow his command to be witnesses to all that they had seen and heard. Suddenly, there is a loud sound like a mighty wind, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them. They begin to speak in different languages, languages they don't even understand. A diverse crowd gathers, and all who were there heard the good news of God in their own language. It must have been a chaotic cacophony of voices!

What is interesting about the account of this wondrous event is its emphasis. The Spirit comes revealing God's presence with fire and wind and noise, but we hardly hear about that. The miracle of Pentecost, it seems, is the unity that came to those who were present. It didn't come because they were suddenly all the same. They still represented diverse places and backgrounds, and they still heard in their individual languages. But in the midst of that difference, they became united in a common story, a shared language of the experience of God's love and goodness and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

There were, apparently, mixed reactions to this holy moment. The text tells us that the crowd was “bewildered,” “amazed,” and “astonished” at what was happening, but some sneered and accused the disciples of being drunk. Instead of finding beauty in the diversity, they were skeptical. Perhaps they were scared. Isn't that indicative of human nature and our culture today? We are bombarded with messages to fear those who are different from us. We are told that we need to build walls and enact laws that will keep us apart. We are suspicious of those who don't

look or believe or talk or vote like us. But Peter's response to the skeptics two thousand years ago holds true for us today. The promise of Pentecost is that God's Spirit is poured out freely and abundantly on *all* humanity. In spite of our distrust, we are created in God's image, differentiated in person but united by a God who loves us and desires wholeness for us all. When seen in this light, the cacophony of voices on that day becomes a chorus of praise, a testament to the beautiful diversity that makes up the body of Christ. We are created for communion with one another in the midst of our differences, held together by the Holy Spirit.

Recently, I read a book called *The Second Mountain* by author and political commentator David Brooks. And in it, he describes his journey of moving from being an atheist to a person of faith. One pivotal moment for him happened at rush hour in Penn Station, the bustling train station in New York City. He says:

I was surrounded as always by thousands of people, silent, sullen, trudging to work in long lines. Normally in those circumstances you feel like just another ant leading a meaningless life in a meaningless universe. Normally the routineness of life dulls your capacity for wonder. But this time everything flipped, and I saw souls in all of them. It was like suddenly everything was illuminated, and I became aware of an infinite depth in each of these thousands of people... souls waking up in the morning. Souls riding the train to work. Souls yearning for goodness. I suddenly regarded the whole crowd with a kind of awe, a reverence, not from the depth of a particular morning but from the depth of centuries. If you think about that for a bit, you are confronted by the possibility that we are connected not just the souls living now, but with the souls of all people who have ever lived... who are still present today because this underlying animating spirit is still and always omnipresent. And if there are souls, it's a short leap to believe that there is something that breathed souls into us through an act of care and love.

This is a beautiful image for us on this Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate that same spirit - the Holy Spirit - that breathed life into the disciples some 2000 years ago and breathes life into every one of us - uniting us and connecting us in mysterious and holy ways. Amen.