

## Reflection on the Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

[\[The video of the reflection.\]](#)

I was talking with a friend from New York, who works in the back office of a Broadway theater. Her friends are all theater people, and she was talking about how, for a group of people whose lives are full of uncertainty, the pandemic has been terrifying. Because they thought they knew how to design their unpredictable lives into something livable. But they're really struggling. "And just when you've kind of pulled yourself together, another siren goes by," she said.

And I was saying how anxious we are when we see a New York or Connecticut license plate in an area that relies on tourism. Because we have so few ICU beds. It won't take much, just a couple of hot spots, a couple of people spreading the virus they don't know they have, and our community is reeling.

It was kind of a long conversation to not say very much. Because I can't imagine the life of a Broadway gypsy. And she can't imagine the life of a rural preacher in a community with only one tiny hospital and a lot of elderly people. We were speaking the same language. But it took us a long time to communicate. To get to the point where we shared the same idea, that we held the same thought in common. Specifically: we need to take care of each other. We need to look around us and make sure that those who are least able aren't bearing most of the burden.

We think of "communicating" as getting a string of text from one head to another. Turn left at the next junction and go a mile and a half to the red barn. Bake at 350° for 12 minutes or until golden brown. And me saying either of those in English when you speak Spanish isn't going work. So I need to speak your language. And anyone who's tried to assemble an Ikea bookshelf knows that directions that just use pictures aren't any clearer. So we react to the Pentecost story with a nod. Of course the Holy Spirit let them speak all the languages of the world. How else are they going to tell the story of Jesus Christ?

What we forget is that for the people at the original Pentecost described in Acts, they already spoke a common language, koine Greek.<sup>3</sup> And they all also probably spoke Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> So getting through to each other wasn't the challenge. The hard part was getting to common understanding.<sup>5</sup> For that I need to speak your language. Getting your parent into assisted living means speaking a new language. Enrolling your kindergartener in school means speaking a new

<sup>3</sup> G. H. C. Macgregor, "The Acts of the Apostles: Exegesis," vol. 9 in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Bible in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1954), 37.

<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Justo L. González, and Catherine Gunsalus González, "The Ins and Outs of Pentecost." *Journal for Preachers* 26, no. 4 (2003), 11.

language. Getting your car serviced means speaking a new language. You may all speak English, but until you have some common language, it's just really hard to know if you should agree to replace the starter motor.

What we also fail to see in the original Pentecost story is that the disciples couldn't wait to share the story of Jesus of Nazareth, of his life, death and resurrection, with a bunch of people who called them drunks.<sup>6</sup> The Holy Spirit may give you gifts to share this transformative story about everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21) and how awesome that is and how much better that makes your life. But you're still going to be sharing it with people who are hostile to you, who think you're nuts for believing it, let alone letting something like that change the way you live your life.<sup>7</sup>

Think about your faith for a minute. What about it makes your life easier? Does it give you more patience, more endurance, more resilience? Does it help you look for the blessing in the midst of a struggle? Does it give you comfort that there's a community that also gets something powerful out of something ancient? Do the rituals settle your heart?

Then think about someone you'll speak to in the next week and a question you can ask them. Where do you get the patience to explain to people that you get multiple deliveries of toilet paper a week? Why don't you just give up asking people about flossing when so few people do it? You said you've come to Lake Potanipo for 20 years. What about it is so relaxing for you?

Then listen for the common ground. Listen for what you both share. Listen for what the Holy Spirit is offering to you, so that you can experience your faith more fully. Because the more adept we become at listening to other people, the more languages we speak, the more likely we will be to speak compellingly of our own faith. The more successful we will be in offering other people the relief and peace and joy that our faith brings us.

Because even as we look for common ground, look for the common language that we speak, we are still only frail, fallible humans. The miracle of Pentecost is not that we can speak other people's language, not that we can share the promise of salvation. The miracle of Pentecost is that God is committed to using such frail and fallible vessels to break down the divisions imposed on us by the powerful systems which like the world the way it is. Even when we are rejected and called drunks, the miracle of Pentecost is that God is determined to use us to get back what belongs to the Kingdom of God.<sup>8</sup> Acting through us, via the Holy

<sup>6</sup>William H. Willimon, " 'Everyone whom the Lord Our God calls': Acts 2 and the Miracle of Pentecost Preaching in a Multicultural Context." *Journal for Preachers* 25, no. 4 (2002), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Willimon, 7.

<sup>8</sup>Willimon, 9.

Spirit, God is determined to save all of us. What miraculous common ground we all stand on, if we only knew it.