

“A Common Language” by Rev. Eric Moeller, St. Lucas UCC, June 9, 2019

There is a story in the Book of Genesis called the Tower of Babel. You may know it. It depicts a time in the world where all of humanity had only one language, and so they design and build a city and tower reaching to the heavens, living as gods. Well, God comes down and sees this city and tower and realizes that yet again humanity is seeking to breach the boundary between human and divine all on their own, so God confuses their language and the people are scattered into separate peoples who can no longer communicate. God saw that, even without God, if humanity had one language nothing would be impossible for them.

Indeed if we cannot communicate effectively with each other, nothing is accomplished, no dream is ever fulfilled. Well, church, I think we might have a problem. In our community, I think there are different languages being spoken, thus creating issues in achieving any dream. What some call life-giving or meaningful, others call death-dealing or offensive. What some call loving, others call hateful. What some call stewardship or giving, others call purchase. What some call moral, ethical, life and death issues, others call politics, and so on and so forth. The lack of a common language results in harm, destruction, and division. However, what this day of Pentecost offers us, what it represents, what it beckons us to is a return to a common language.

Marcus Borg described the day of Pentecost as the undoing of the Tower of Babel, as it brings back together the broken and divided community of humanity. The Acts story describes how there were faithful from every nation under heaven there, and suddenly the Spirit, moving through the disciples, broke down the barriers of communication and allowed all of them to hear the good news of God’s deeds in their own language. The Spirit acted as a translator to make communication possible. Peter seems to have recognized what was happening and was able to share that the Spirit of God had indeed been poured out and had come to give divine dreams and visions to people, young and old, slave and free, men and women, to unite humanity in the common goals of the Spirit of God of not only living in unity, as those at Babel did, but living in unity in the pursuit of God’s purposes, God’s dreams of the redemption or salvation of creation; God’s dreams as shared through the work and word of Jesus Christ.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, part of what the Spirit does in and through us is joins us with Christ, and gives us the knowledge that we are Children of God. This is the root of the common language that the Spirit gives us. We are all Children of God, gifted and guided by the Spirit, if we are able to understand. We are all given dreams and visions for our lives, the life of our congregation, and the life of the world. Yes, we all have dreams and visions, I think every person does, so how do we know what comes from the Spirit? Well, Jesus’ life and testament serve as the baseline, the measuring stick, against which we measure our dreams, our visions, our thoughts, our beliefs, and the actions we are guided toward. Thus, the Gospel of Jesus Christ serves as our common language, our translator, if indeed our dreams, words, actions, and beliefs are truly rooted in that Gospel. By the Spirit we are guided in the paths of Christ, even those that lead us to suffer as Christ suffered, as Paul writes. Sometimes, I think this bit is overlooked, right. You see Christ lived his life entirely rooted in God’s dreams for the redemption of creation; rooted in a radical steadfast love seeking lasting peace rooted in justice; rooted in a vision of life that was so dangerous he was executed by the state, even with the support of religious authorities. By the

Pentecost Spirit, we are joined to that kind of transformative, unrelenting, defiant way of living and loving in the world; joined to a transformative, unrelenting, and defiant dream and vision of creation that is not conquered by the powerful through division, but made whole by the steadfast love of God. The Pentecost Spirit was poured out so we would not be guided by fear, but live by the Spirit in the paths of Christ boldly. The Pentecost Spirit was poured out on the flesh of humanity to create a community of people grounded in such a love for the cause of salvation, of redemption, and, church, now, that community is us. The challenge is can we be unrelentingly rooted in this Spirit-given common language of love? Can we rely upon the Pentecost Spirit to help us understand each other that we may pursue God's dreams to us, our community, and our world together? God has given us a gift in this Spirit, and we are indeed a Spirit-filled community. May we speak, move, and act according to that Spirit, rooted in the radically loving and just ways of the one to whom we've been joined: Jesus Christ.