

The Day of Pentecost, New Testament, Year C

CULTURE SHOCK

Acts 2:1-11

The Day of Pentecost

Analysis by Peter Keyel

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Par'thians and Medes and E'lamites and residents of Mesopota'mia, Judea and Cappado'cia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phryg'ia and Pamphyl'ia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyre'ne, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

DIAGNOSIS: A Babel of Voices

Step 1 Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Failing to Communicate

Communication failures are common. They're exacerbated when

different cultures and different languages find themselves living together. A mistranslation, a misunderstood cultural practice is all it may take to cause offense. When we deal with people of different cultures or languages, it's easy for us to assume they are backwards. Sometimes the cultural difference is immediately apparent, like with someone from another country. Sometimes it's more nuanced, like political affiliation. Or even youth to age, or pick your favorite subculture. Any way it's sliced, even when we ARE talking with the same language, we're talking past each other and failing to communicate.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Filled with Tradition

The problem isn't so much that others are backwards, nor is it that we always hold their backwardness against them. It's that we celebrate our tradition. We are devout people, each favoring our own traditions from whatever nation, political party, or other identity we align with. Even when our tradition demands open-mindedness, we tend to draw the line at close-mindedness or the harm we see others doing. Even when we try to see beyond our tradition, we see it colored by our own perspective. And, honestly, isn't our perspective usually better than the other's? If they only shared our tradition, everything would be great!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Scattered

When we each cling to our own traditions, we end up scattered and divided. We could have one universal language, and we could make communication a priority. We even try sometimes. Yet, invariably we cling to our traditions and our languages at the cost of division and misunderstanding. It's as if God himself is confusing our languages and scattering us.

PROGNOSIS: A Spirit of Utterance

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Gathered

Yet God is bent on gathering us into one. Not only did Jesus Christ die for all, but he was also raised to affirm this new plan for gathering. Even after Jesus' ascension, God continues to gather us and advocate for us through the Holy Spirit. God appoints the day of Pentecost with no regard to our having earned it, and arrives "from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind" (v. 2).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Filled with the Holy Spirit

With our sin buried in Jesus' grave, we hold to the promise of Christ's resurrection life—God's determined gathering plan. The result is that all are filled with the Holy Spirit. Trusting in the Spirit's work instead of tradition, the apostles (and we) can now speak in other tongues, in other ways, as only the Spirit can help them (and us) do.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Speaking in Tongues
The result is that those of other cultures and languages are amazed that they are hearing in their "own tongues the mighty works of God." (v.11). Instead of failing to communicate, with the Holy Spirit we can now speak to each other—across the barriers of language, ideology, and generations. And with our own lips we tell of this amazing thing God has done to gather us in and break down communication barriers.