

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who sends us this gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

I learned to speak English as my primary language probably at the age of two or three like most other toddlers. I love trying to communicate with Emery. She has a really big vocabulary for a three year old. She really loves to act out the stories she has read to her or that she sees on videos. Right now, her current favorite is the three little pigs. We all act the story out then Emery changes the roles. She'll assign new parts and we go through the whole story again and again and again... What makes story time so much fun is when Emery reaches the limits of her vocabulary skills and goes into make it up mode... Most of the time we can figure out what she's trying to say, but there are other times when only she knows what she's saying. Since learning English, I've taken French in High School, German in College, and both Greek and Hebrew in Seminary. Although I passed every class with good grades I can't speak any of those languages. You see if you don't continue to use the language skills you'll lose them.

Today's scripture isn't so much about speaking in a different language as it is about hearing in your own native tongue. The miracle of Christian Pentecost is that all those foreigners who were in Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks, which was a celebration of the first harvest, could hear God's Word in their own native language so they could hear and understand it. For many years I thought Pentecost

was God's way of reversing what went wrong in the story of the Tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis... I was taught in Sunday School, God was putting things back the way they were before the languages got all confused. That's one way to look at what happened during the Feast of Weeks in Jerusalem all those years ago, but I believe there's a much better interpretation.

To understand what's really going on here you need to go all the way back to the beginning... When God made human beings he blessed them and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. They were to fill the entire face of the earth and stay in relationship with their creator and sustainer God. Things went terribly wrong when sin entered the world. Humans became disobedient and forgot where all their blessings came from. Rather than multiplying across the entire earth they began to build cities. Cities had walls and towers. These were to keep the inhabitants safe and separated from the rest of the world, out there... The Bible says the people decided to build a tower to the highest heavens in order to make a name for themselves. They wanted to be great and forgot all about the God who created and blessed them. Instead of scattering around the world they gathered inside their walled city and praised themselves for all they had accomplished, on their own, without God... God didn't confuse their single language to keep them from building because he was afraid of the competition if they became too godlike, he did it as a blessing, to give them the nudge they

needed to move on out and fulfill the purpose for which they were created in the first place to spread God's name and praise all over the world. If you look around at our world you have to conclude that God loves diversity. I mean there are over 900,000 different species of insects alone and more discovered all the time. When God commanded humans to multiply and fill the earth the mission was to have as many different cultures and peoples as the earth would hold. We've turned God's blessing around when we fail to love the diverse peoples and cultures around us.

All this got me to wondering this week... What language does God speak? Some churches who still use the King James version of the Bible would say God speaks in the Olde English, of course. Do you know what language Jesus spoke? He didn't know English, that's almost for certain... Well, if seminary makes you take Hebrew and Greek you might think it would be a safe bet to say either one of those, but you'd be wrong... Jesus actually spoke the Aramaic language. There's only one or two passages in the New Testament that refer to Aramaic. In the Lord's Prayer when Jesus begins with the Our Father, that word for father is in Aramaic. The word Abba or Father, that's one of the few references in the Bible to the language of Jesus, but what about the language of God?

I don't have an easy answer for that one... God speaks in so many ways. I wish God would speak openly and plainly as He did with Moses through the burning bush or to Isaiah or any of the prophets. I've experienced God's guiding

hand many times in my life, but those times are too few and too far apart. The more I think about it the more I have to thank God for not speaking all the time. God gives us a pretty wide birth to lead our own lives and exercise our own free will. It's during those times when I've had big decisions to make and when I faced a fork in the road that I looked for and prayed for God's word to fall afresh on me.

How do you understand when God speaks your name? His message, even in my expensive study Bibles is already translated from the Aramaic Jesus spoke to the Greek and Hebrew that was written down some 50 or more years after the events themselves actually took place and then into English. On this day of Pentecost God breathed into all the believers, God's Holy Spirit and the Christian Church was born. Unlike what I had thought most of my life, God did not simply reversed the effects of the story of the Tower of Babel. On that Pentecost day roughly 2000 years ago when the Holy Spirit came upon the church in Jerusalem each person heard God's word in their own native tongue. The Bible doesn't say all the languages became one single language, but rather that each heard his or her own native language. Then, after the Festival of Weeks had concluded, all those folks went back home, still speaking their own native languages. The effects of the Tower of Babel were not reversed, but God intervened in such a way that the Good News of Jesus Christ was spread in the fastest and most effective way possible for those ancient times and people. Since Saint Paul only went to the city of Rome at

the end of his life, the Christian Church in Rome was most likely founded by one or a group of these Jewish people returning from the experience of Pentecost.

Today we have devices that can translate language and speak the words in your own language through a tiny speaker in your ear as small as a hearing aid. If God wanted to announce something important today He might use television sets equipped with closed captioning so you can at least read the words in your own language... Seems we humans never stopped trying to build that tower of Babel...

As human beings our natural tendency is to live life in fear. We tend to build walls around ourselves. We like to gather with people who speak our own language and are safe, and we want to keep everyone else out. We also tend to be self-serving and forget that God is the giver of life and it is God's name that is to be praised, not ours. Pentecost reminds us God's mission moves in the opposite direction. God is the giver of life and has created all things, and continues to create and sustain all things. The mission of God is not to get everyone to look and act exactly the same, but is to help us remember it is God's name that gets the glory, not our own. God calls us out of our self-serving and fearful ways into a life of generosity and trust in God, through Jesus, and in the Power of the Holy Spirit.

I'm still beating about the bush on this question of what language God speaks... Gary Chapman, famous for writing the book the 5 Love Languages recognized there are basically 5 ways humans relate to each other. He calls them

the 5 love languages. If you want to be understood by your spouse or significant other person in your life, then you need to know their love language and how to speak so they understand. The five languages are Words of affirmation, Quality time, Physical touch, Acts of service, and Receiving gifts. If you want to enrich your relationship with your spouse or significant other. learn what love language they speak and communicate with them in their native love language. We know that God is love, and as much as I appreciate the concept of these five love languages, I don't think God speaks in any one of these.

What language does God speak? God speaks every language. God is with us, in every culture, and the mission is to bring every culture to call on God's name, in their own language, so that God can get the glory of the entire earth. AS different as we all are, we are united by one thing, our dependency on God. God is with us. God gathers us in this place around the body and blood of the crucified and risen Jesus, so that we can be scattered into the world to bring glory to God's name among all people.

May we be people gathered by the calling of the Holy Spirit and fed with the Word of God, equipped with God's forgiveness and grace and then sent back out into the world that so desperately needs to know God's love. May we break down the walls of fear and scarcity so God's name is truly praised and Honor is given to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, amen.