

Have you ever had a “wow” moment, a moment so powerful, so unique, so special that it can only be characterized as an “act of God”? I know I have. I’ve actually had a couple. One, of course, was when I first met my now wife, and I had a moment of “where have you been all my life?” The other moment, one that I feel is the most unique and “wow” of all was in my first trimester of seminary, where I (and all other first-year students) were required to take a “Spiritual Formation” class. In it, all first-years learned about different types of prayers and were required to actually practice them, to see what practices might fit for us and to develop a stronger spiritual practice routine. Towards the beginning of the 10-week class, we were studying *Lectio Divina*, best described as meditating on a particular passage. My passage one night was in Matthew, and it was Jesus teaching how we must love our enemies. My bullies from high school immediately came to mind, and I all of a sudden felt filled with loathing for them, because up to that point, I still had no answer as to why God let them do and say those things to me. So, I’m kneeling on the floor, my Bible open on the floor in front of me. I’m praying for God to help me understand why they were allowed to do what they did and to forgive them their transgressions after all this time. Suddenly, the one light in the room grew at least ten times brighter, the room seemed to warm to that perfect temperature we’re never able to set our thermostats to, and I heard a voice I’d never heard before, but somehow knew who it was. That voice said, “If they had not done what they did, you would not have turned to me. You should be thanking them.” Before I could look up, my room went back to its normal temperature and the light went back to its usual brightness. When I do look up, it’s just me in the room. In that moment, I realized not only what had just happened, but that the voice was right. No more was I angry at them for what they did, because I understood it as the means by which God prepared me for a call to ministry.

I tell you this story because today is Pentecost, a day when the common reading is nothing short of a “wow” moment. I invite you to picture it in your mind. The disciples are among all these other Jews from all these other lands. Each has its own language, dialect, sets of practices. They commonly would have to lean over and ask people, “What does this word mean” or “What is he/she saying?”. Then, suddenly, this fierce wind starts blowing through the house, shaking it, and the disciples start speaking in the various tongues present in the room. Notice the wording used: the disciples began speaking different languages that all might know and understand the Word of God. It wasn’t that the crowd all began understanding one language, but that many languages were spoken so that all might understand. There was no leaning over to ask “what does that word mean?” There was not a person thinking “I don’t understand.” Everyone got the same message, but their diversity of cultures was preserved. Here we have an example of God preserving and encouraging diversity while also promoting inclusion and unity.

We even see it in the clarification Peter gives. “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.” Here we have a unity that exists within our differences. “Sons and daughters”; there isn’t just one gender from that point forward, but there is both men *and* women, and *both* shall receive the Spirit. So, gender is not a barrier to receiving the Spirit. “Young men . . . and old men”; regardless of age, the Spirit shall fill you up and guide you. So, age is not a barrier to receiving the Spirit. “Even your slaves, both the men and the women”; regardless of social class, the Spirit shall fill you up and give you gifts of the Spirit. The many languages represent the many cultures and races, and therefore race shall not be a barrier to the Spirit. Race, gender, age, social class; the four big “seas” I spoke about a couple weeks ago, the four big barriers that we as humans have used to

divide ourselves into “us” and “them,” none of them shall keep a person from being considered a Child of God, receiving the Spirit, any of it. God is sending one of the most powerful message in the Bible right in this very passage: that though there are differences between us, we are one. Though we may come from different families, cultures, though we may speak different languages, the Spirit is the thing that bonds us all together, unifies us as one cohesive Body of Christ.

All of us are called to prophesy, to share the good news and speak the Word of God, to one another. This doesn't mean you have to go out and backpack all over to stand on wooden crates on street corners to tell people about Christ's saving grace. “Speaking the good news” is something that is also done in different ways. My wife doesn't like public speaking, but boy o boy can she cook and bake. Some of you out there can knit, sew, and make things. Others, you're very good with gardening equipment and fixing things. Still other, like myself, know how valuable it can be to have someone who will listen and not judge, someone who will be that calm presence when it feels like the world is a raging storm. These gifts, these skills, they are “languages” of a sort, and yet, they all can be used to communicate the same message: ours is a God of love, a God who doesn't care about your age, race, sex, social standing, or any of that, a God who forgives time and again our transgressions because of a love that knows no bounds. We all speak many languages. The only question is: have you been using your unique language to convey that universal message?