

In the beginning, we all spoke the same language.

Then, in our arrogance, we thought we could build a tower to God. The purpose of the tower of Babel was not to glorify God, but to glorify ourselves. This tower wasn't erected to help the well-being of all people everywhere, it was built as a monument to pride, the pride that we could reach heaven without God's help.

God recognized the fact that the tower wasn't built in order for humankind to be able to see and speak to each other with greater facility. God understood that some thought that because we were smart enough to build a tower, God would now be obligated to treat us as the little gods we now believed ourselves to be.

God disliked this arrogance. So God destroyed the tower of Babel, and in the process—our common human language was destroyed. We thought we would never be able to understand each other again.

Today we celebrate Pentecost.

On this day the Spirit of God didn't just fall on the few, the important ones who held the power in this Jesus movement, it fell on everyone. Young, old, wealthy, impoverished, even the women and the children.

The Spirit on this day did a rather spectacular thing: it allowed everyone to understand each other clearly for the first time since the tower of Babel fell. Everyone understood the message of God—in their own language.

We need this gift today. Right now. Because it sure is getting harder and harder to understand each other today.

The day before I left for vacation, the people of Buffalo were stunned by a shooting in a supermarket. 10 black people were gunned down while shopping for groceries.

Just over a week later, a largely Latino school in Texas was assaulted by another shooting. This time 22 children and adults died.

212 mass shootings have occurred in the US so far this year: mass shootings being defined as an incident in which 4 or more people were shot or killed—excluding the shooter.

It has gotten to the point where we are not shocked enough by these facts.

I will tell you that some of us really didn't want me to talk about shootings or guns here in church today.

Why? I'm not really sure, but I can probably guess.

Possibly they thought it could worry the kids. Trust me, the kids are already worried. They're the ones that practice drills for mass shootings. If we were really concerned about the kids—there are things we could do.

Other people just don't want me to stir the pot. Rock the boat. Why not?? Our children are dying! What on earth could be a better reason for rocking the boat?

Many of us find it difficult to understand the world today. There seems to be a very real need for the Holy Spirit to come upon us all--so that we could truly understand each other

And I'm not speaking about the republicans and democrats who need to understand each other. How about all of us trying to understand what it's like to be a child going to school and being aware that this could be the day that news crews come to Camden.

We need the Spirit to lead us into a place where we can come together, talk, and really understand why this country—far beyond all others--- has decided that lives are less important than guns. Why *people* are less important than political principles we hold.

Is there a part of “Love one another as I have loved you” that only includes “thoughts and prayers?”

My Lord, *would be helpful* if everyone could suddenly understand their neighbors—what they were feeling, the message they were trying to speak?

I think we can hear each other. I think our hearing is just fine.

But we are using our words like bricks to build walls that separate us.

It’s like we each have built our own little tower of Babel around our hearts. We need to tear down these walls so we can not only *hear*, but we can really *understand* each other.

We all think we are speaking the same language, but how can we be? We don’t seem to be able to reach each other with our common language.

We need the Holy Spirit. We need to “*hear, each of us, in our own native language*” what it is we are trying to say to each other, and others are trying to say to us.

How many of us – when we listen to people—just hear the “what” of what another person is saying: what they think, what is important, what they want to do—but we don’t hear the “why”?

WHY do they think that? WHY is it important, WHY does someone need a particular outcome?

Our communication is failing.

And so we come again to the feast of the Pentecost. The feast where God gives his people the ability to speak out in a way everyone can understand.

It’s also the feast where God gave people the ability to hear what was being spoken in a way that everyone could take in.

We need the Holy Spirit to fall on us again.

So we can speak honestly. So we can hear the nuances.

But mostly, so we can understand each other, so that we can do what benefits every person in our world. We need to stop glorifying talking points, and instead glorify God. We need to stop building up the fortresses that keep us apart, and reach across the rubble of their disintegration.

As MLK said, “We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we will perish together as fools.”

In the beginning we spoke the same language. We can do it again if we can only learn to listen for both the “what’s” and, more importantly, the “why’s”.

Holy Spirit help us to listen to each other with your ears and understand each other with the mind of Christ.
Amen.