
Pentecost Groans and Translations

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Day of Pentecost – Year B

You have heard the languages today! Can you hear the crying? Can you hear the groaning? If it is a baptism morning at the church, there is almost always some crying. We twist and turn even if it is not a baptism morning!

And the crying, the groaning, does not come only from children. Take a moment and listen right now, wherever you are. The crying, the groaning, does not come only from outside us. The crying and the groaning come from inside us, too.

This past week, I mentioned to someone that we would be baptizing children today, and that it might be a bit noisy. And he said, you know, I like it when the children are squirming and loud. He was right. I like it, too. This crying, even this groaning, is a sign of life! I give thanks for the crying and the groaning.

Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, wrote some remarkable words about groaning. He said,

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.... Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:22-23, 26).

Yes, the whole creation groans, Saint Paul said, the whole creation groans in labor pains, waiting for something to be born. Just like young children groaning as they wait to be born again. Just like adults who groan, inwardly, waiting for something to be born in us.

It is the Spirit. It is the Spirit, said Saint Paul, who is praying inside us, interceding with sighs too deep for words.

Today –Pentecost Sunday!—we remember that there is a language of the Spirit that is deeper than our rational and intelligible words. There is a sweet, sweet, Spirit in this place, in us, that longs for adoption and spiritual identity.

We often concentrate on languages at the Feast of the Pentecost. On that first Pentecost, the disciples were fascinated with language.

“How is it,” they asked, “that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2:8,11). And so we here, at the Cathedral of St. Philip, try to recreate that experience when we present this morning’s gospel in various languages. The experience of various languages can be fascinating. It can be bewildering. It can be mystical.

Imagine the sounds that an extra-powerful microphone from outer space might pick up if it was pointed at the earth. It would hear not just one language, but thousands of languages and dialects. And it would hear not just intelligible sounds, but all sorts of groans and calls and songs from all God’s creation. Do you remember the movie, *The Matrix*, with its opening sequence of sounds and computer code and babel? Yes, ever since the Tower of Babel, we have known that there are thousands of languages in the world. Most of them are unintelligible to us.

So, this morning, I give thanks not just for the languages here. And not just for the cries and groans. I give thanks for the translators. The real miracle of Pentecost is not just the speaking in tongues. It's the translation. Pentecost is about translation.

The great miracle work of the Holy Spirit is the work of translation. I know there are other works of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is that power of God that inspires us and charges us for service. The Holy Spirit teaches us, consoles us, loves us.

But the Holy Spirit also translates for us. The Holy Spirit is the One who enables us to hear one language and translate it into another. I am speaking, this morning, not only about academic theory and linguistic ability. Today, the great translators in this room today are not just those who spoke in different languages a few minutes ago.

In the Spirit, in the Holy Spirit of God, all of us are translators. For instance, I have little idea what these new born babies mean with their crying or movements. But their mothers do. Watch their mothers and their fathers. They are translating every minute. The work of mothering and fathering is always about translating – taking the old customs and traditions and truths and translating them to their children. Taking the custom of baptism and translating it to children.

A spouse right now, is trying to translate, trying to interpret, the inward groans of a partner. What do they mean? What are they trying to say? A friend is translating the cries of another friend.

This past year, teachers in Sunday Schools have been translating scripture, once again, into language that children can understand. Bankers and lawyers and developers and businesswoman are translating their vision into one that can be understood by their neighbors, by society.

And, today, in the Christian Church, we are all translating together, in the power of the Holy Spirit of God. What makes any translation holy, is when that translation points to the power of God.

That is what the onlookers exclaimed on that day in Jerusalem: "How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:8-11).

We hear them speaking about God's deeds of power!

That is the sign of Pentecost. It is not just the drama of fire and foreign tongues. The Holy Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, will always be speaking about God's deeds of power.

That will be the sign that someone is speaking, someone is translating, in the Holy Spirit. They will be speaking of God's deeds of power. They will be speaking peace in the same way that Jesus left his disciples peace. They will be speaking truth, in the Spirit of truth, which Jesus said will abide in us believers (John 14:17).

And all of us, all of us on the Day of Pentecost, have the power to speak that truth, to speak that peace, to speak of God's grace. Today, we celebrate God's gift upon each and every one of us – from the youngest to the oldest. We can speak love to each other. We can speak of God to each other. We can speak truth to each other.

Yes, that love and truth and power may have to be translated. But on Pentecost, we get the translation right.

Whatever we say, on whatever occasion, from the challenges of business to the moodiness of adolescence, from the complexities of relationships to the wailing of children, the word of God will be truth, power, and love. The translation in all these languages is that God loves us and empowers us to love one another!

AMEN.

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