

Text: [Acts 2:1-21](#)

Date: May 28, 2023

Title: “A Home for All People” > Pentecost > Church: Does It Matter?, Wk 7

Theme: The Church matters because here we have a shared connection to the story of God’s mighty works, a story that changes us and the world.

1

Maybe it’s because my oldest is a senior in high school this year
And I’m watching her go through all the end-of-year rituals with her circle of friends

Thinking back to my own experiences in my freshman year of college,
remembering what it was like to navigate that landscape where you’re trying to make friends and figure out where you belong

It could also be that there’s something about getting back to an in-person annual conference

Finally seeing friends and colleagues I’ve not been with since May 2019 – four years ago! –

realizing how much you’ve missed them, what the simple act of gathering together means

Whatever it is, I’ve been thinking about the question of who our people are

How we go about finding them

And why it matters so much

There is a simple thing that gives me a lot of joy as a pastor

It’s almost too simple, really – you may not think much about it

But it’s when I’m scrolling social media and see folks from the church hanging out together

Doing something fun, taking a trip, going to dinner

Why does that matter to me?

It matters because in that, I see evidence of real community in that

It’s not small groups as a program, but rather organically developed

People finding their people and doing life together

Not just on a Sunday morning, but over the course of months and years and decades

More than anything else, to me *that's* the evidence of whether a church is fulfilling its mission

Do people love each other here?

When they move out of state, is one of the hardest things about it stepping away from church community they've come to know and love?

If that's the case, then you know something is right about that place and its people

2

Earlier this year, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory in response to a unique public health crisis: loneliness¹

For those who might not be familiar, an advisory is meant to call the nation's attention to an urgent public health challenge and offers recommendations for how it might be addressed

Though loneliness has been a growing problem for years, the pandemic exacerbated people's experiences of feeling isolated

And Americans aren't alone in this: health agencies in Japan, Australia, and the UK have all highlighted the issue, and some are taking steps against it²

The problem is significant: today, about 50% of adults report feeling lonely
And the risk associated with diminished social connections is significant
Loneliness can elevate one's risk of premature death about as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day – that's almost a full pack

Unsurprisingly, the surgeon general's advisory points to churches and other faith-based organizations as having a key role to play in helping people make and keep connections

3

Which brings me to today's scripture

This moment when the Spirit gives life to the community of the Church

We think about Pentecost as this moment of the miraculous

When the Holy Spirit descends and people begin speaking in different languages, even ones they'd never spoken before

But I don't think it's the notion of people speaking DIFFERENT
LANGUAGES that's the point here
I think it's the fact that the people are telling the SAME STORY about the
grace and power of the SAME GOD

Let me explain what I mean
By my count, I think there are 17 or 18 different people groups named in
the scripture

(Which makes it a real treat for anyone assigned to read today – thank
you!)

When the Spirit descends, what each of those groups hears is a message
about “the mighty works of God”

Unique languages, yes, but the same story – about Christ crucified and
raised to live among us

I want to take us back, test your memory for a minute
Do you remember when we first started this series right after Easter,
when Kate talked to us about the need for us in the church to become
storytellers?

That Sunday we learned that part of the purpose of the Church is to create
spaces for each of us to be able to tell our story of faith

The idea was that each one of us has a unique story – how God's grace
and power has been made real in our lives

each of us speaks a particular language - a dialect uniquely our own

And yet, the stories all speak of God's love and power at work in the world

About friends we didn't expect to find

Wisdom and insight we didn't know we'd need

Resources that arrived at just the right time

Forgiveness and love that healed and changed our lives

And most of all,

a God who would not let us go, even when we thought all was lost

We speak different languages, but we tell the same story

That's the beauty of Christ's Church

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What this has meant for me, over and over again –
Is that when I am in need of encouragement,
Even when I am in danger of my faith failing,
I can listen to the unique languages of friends here in the Church
And through them find my way back into the larger story of what God has
done and is doing – not just for them
But for me too

This happened to me again just a couple weeks ago, listening to a
colleague's sermon
He was sharing details of his call & experience of God
And even though the details were new to me
Overall, the story was familiar

I was reminded that I'm not crazy for believing like I do
And for choosing to pattern my life according to that belief
Because God IS real, despite daily evidence to the contrary

Suddenly, I didn't feel alone anymore
But deeply connected
To my colleague, to the others who shook their heads in agreement,
And to the God who had spoken to us all – it was a Holy Spirit moment

5

What's powerful about the Church is not just that we're HEARING the same
story about the same God who loves each and every one of us
But it's also fact that we PARTICIPATE in that same story
That we live out of it, sharing God's love with others
What God's love does in MY life has the power to affect YOU too

Perhaps our greatest temptation is to believe that our experience is
singular and solitary
That no one else has ever experienced anything like us
That no one else could possibly understand us
I'm convinced that this feeling – “you wouldn't understand”
More than anything, is the source of our isolation

But on Pentecost, the Church realized something
Even though we may speak different languages
We DO understand each other

THAT's what's life-changing about it
It's why we celebrate Pentecost

Because, in a moment where people all around us are experiencing
isolation
Here in the Church there is a shared connection to the story of God's
mighty works
A story with the power to change not only us
But the world through the mission it places on our lives
The mission to share this story with others

I speak of this story's power to change the world not in an aspirational way
– like “look what *could* be”
As though the world has never seen or experienced this power before

It's not just aspirational, it's factual: because literally the ONLY reason why
we're even here today
Is because down through the ages, our ancestors found themselves in this
story – thousands, and millions, and billions of people before us
Have found themselves in this story and embraced it as their mission
And so built churches and schools and hospitals and ministries that touch
the lives of millions

The Church matters because here we are reminded that we are not alone
No matter what the language, the love and the power of God always
translates

My challenge to you today is this: find one person today – just one – and
invite them to lunch, or coffee
Learn something about their story, and tell them something about yours
Because we are the community where all stories point us back to the ONE
story we know in Jesus Christ

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

² <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-07-2021-new-advocacy-brief-highlights-serious-consequences-of-social-isolation-and-loneliness-on-the-health-of-older-people-calls-for-greater-political-priority-to-the-issue>