

You Need To Speak in Tongues

Happy Pentecost. This is the Sunday in the Christian calendar that celebrates the birthday of the church: that story that took place with the tongues of fire, that's why I'm wearing red today representing the red tongues of fire Pentecost, is the beginning of the Christian church as we know it. So it's an important day to pay attention. What were they trying to do? What did they learn? They learned to speak in tongues. You may have heard that expression before and so I think that's something that the Christian church should be learning to do. We should all be learning to speak in tongues. And probably not the way you've heard it referred to before but there has never been a more important time in the history of the world that we can speak in different languages. I would argue that the role of Christians seeking to follow Christ- our primary role in the world today as peacemakers, is the ability to translate across different cultures, languages and understandings.

Now in this story today I told two stories: one is Bible, which is the famous myth of the Tower of Babel where it's said: that's where language came from; everybody ends up going in different directions. And then we come full to the book mark of Pentecost which is actually people are able to translate again so we have the division and the division is being overcome by the ability for the disciples to speak in all of these different languages to everyone about the good news of Jesus. And the good news of Jesus is that God loves us and we're to love one another. That's the message they're trying to communicate to all these people in this very crowded city of Jerusalem at that time. So that's the context. How are we doing in that today? Well today we around the world, we're facing one of the most difficult periods of speaking to each other. And it's not just linguistic; language is where we're getting good at overcoming. I know that when I travel I can push an app on my phone and I can say "I need you to take me to my hotel," and I can play the app for the cab driver and I can get to my hotel. Technology is overcoming the challenge that

many of us had including me of speaking different languages. So it's not just the literal languages that I'm talking about but I'm really wanting to focus on today is the differences in values that we have around the world and our inability to hear each other with these different values. We have such a vast world and we are so communicative but we have some people who are operating at a value system of the world. We have some people who are operating at the world level: you want a conquest, you want a strong man and you want to defeat the enemy and it's not about rules or laws it's whoever's strongest. That's a value system in our world today that has existed back to the time of Genesis.

Then we have a value system in the world today of people who are operating at a traditional level. They have rules, they put faith in family and religion and that's a different value system. And in the last century or so we've come to really develop another value system called 'Modern,' where people are more secular, they're more scientific-focused, they believe in the marketplace and that's a whole different value system. And then we're developing other ones like 'Postmodern' who are critical of 'Modern.'" We have all these different value systems going on in the world right now and it's really hard when you have a value system, to hear what others believe. In our country today we're facing a really- I think- a crisis. In our own political system where people can simply not hear each other and they almost want to go to **[00:04:21]** to solve things because they're having such a hard time hearing each other. I think that the role of the church at this time is absolutely crucial that we become better translators, translating across all these sectors. If we're going to be peacemakers we have to learn to speak the languages of those we're working with and the languages we're trying to communicate. What are the skills of translators in this world that we're in right now? What can we develop?

In my world, my life I've spent a lot of my time doing translation and I've done it good and I've done it bad and I've learned lessons. I do a lot work and have a company in Mexico and it wasn't too long ago I was speaking there and I had a speech on leadership and I went in and I just couldn't wait to speak. In fact there was someone speaking ahead

of me and I kept thinking wait till they hear what I have to say cause I got this great speech on leadership and they're just gonna love it. Now of course, being a typical American I didn't speak it in Spanish this [00:05:37] speaks fluent English. So that's not very good and then I gave my speech and it completely flapped and afterwards they said in so many words "You're just another Yankee trying to sell something to us. This is a marketing plan, what are you trying to push over?" And that wasn't my gold at all. I had failed the fundamental role of a good translator: I didn't listen at all to what they were talking about. I came in with my great ideas and they were great ideas but it was such a flap, I mean I'll never forget it-when you have a presentation like that and it goes so bad.

The ability to listen I think, is the first part of being a great translator. Particularly in the church we tend to think that it's preaching and the worst are the ministers- we ministers, who are preaching at you: "You just listen to us." Great translators listen. I ran across this quote this week and you've heard me talk about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, He was my cousin so that's one reason I pay so much attention to him. And I loved what he said for the church about listening. And if you don't mind I'm going to read it because it's so well said. He said "The first service that one owe to others in fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His word, so the beginning of love for one another is learning to listen to them. It is God' love for us that He not only gives us His word but He lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others. And they have this one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking."

I love that quote, we need to first as translators, listen to where people are coming from before we preach. The second skill set that I have experienced and I struggled with, is the ability to empathize. I have trained many non-profit groups on how to go to Capitol Hill to engage them on their policy. And in the training I say "You're going to this office." In

this office they're listening for these words. And within thirty seconds, thirty seconds they're going to decide if they have to keep listening. After that they'll decide "We don't need to listen, keep nodding my head, keep smiling until you leave and that you're not on my team. I don't, you're not speaking my language. You're speaking a different team's language. I got eight more meetings today. This is one I can check off." What's interesting though in the training and coaching of the non-profits is they often say "I don't wanna think like they think. They're wrong. I don't want to be in there shoes. They need to change and be more like me." Not a very successful strategy for translation. The third that I discovered in translating is we need to be quicker to forgive others' mistakes. The most difficult conversations we have in our country right now are on political parties or topics like abortion, transgender rights most recently, the battle over prayer in schools and where the secular roles are all dividing out. We got very divisive things going on,

I've discovered that as a translator we got to be a lot more forgiving of people when they get it wrong. Very often when people are trying to share something, they're not, they don't have the right words and they can insult us. Great translators have to allow them to make mistakes. Consider the motivation of the person talking instead of saying "Boy you just offended me stop, you just offended me." I can almost promise you the translation will stop too. People **[00:10:01]**, I offended you, let's not talk anymore. So I think we have to develop these skills and we need to listen better, we need to become more empathetic and we also have to thicken our skin a little bit and not be so sensitive to the mistakes, genuine mistake people make because when we engage in difficult conversations with different values, we're going to accidentally offend each other. We've got to forgive. And so with that, let us learn as Christians and lead the way in speaking in the tongues of the world so we can become peacemakers for God. Here ends the sermon.

