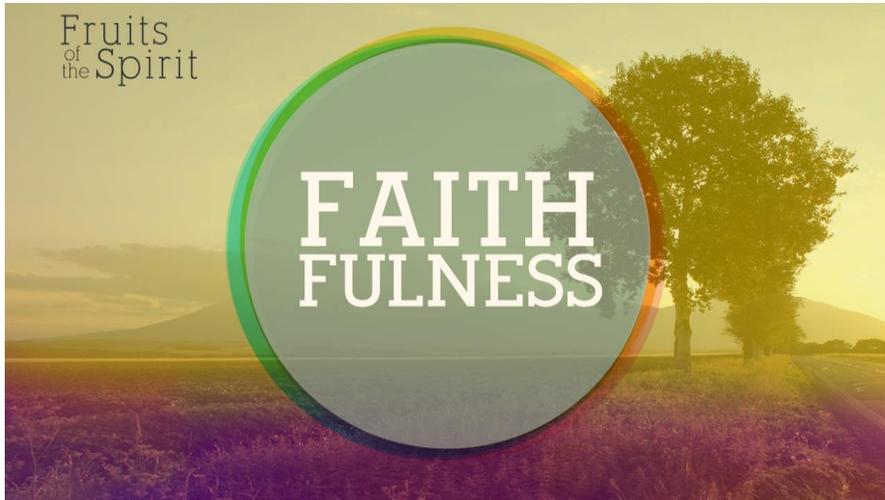


## VOICE RECOGNITION

A Sermon by Rev. John Weems  
May 24, 2015



### Words and Action: The Fruit of the Spirit

#### Acts 2: 1-8; 12-15

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and

addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

#### Acts 2:43-47

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

TODAY WE CONTINUE A SERIES ON THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT WITH THE TOPIC OF FAITHFULNESS.

Single people on the dating scene regularly tell me that they dread "the talk" about a different sort of faithfulness than their romantic interest expects, the one in which they confess to being a person of faith, a Christian active in a church community.

Even in platonic relationships, we can fear revealing our faith. At least one of you here today probably told your roommate you were going out to brunch or a SoulCycle class or even mechanical bull riding, rather than share your faith.

I don't blame you. As long as humans have been seeking to follow God, people have been suspicious.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, sometimes referred to as the beginning of the Christian Church. Pentecost means fifty, and the first one came a few weeks after the death and resurrection of Jesus. On that day, thousands gathered and something amazing happened—they could understand each other! A unity they had never known came over the crowd, but not everyone was on board with this.

Many assumed they had been doing some early drinking, maybe a few too many mimosas. Peter, one of the original disciples of Jesus, jumps to their defense: "Indeed, these are not drunk as you suppose for it is only nine o'clock in the morning." Had Peter been around Bay to Breakers or many other events in our fair city, he probably wouldn't have assumed people were sober merely because it was 9:00 am. Nonetheless, Peter wants to make it clear that something miraculous was happening.

In Acts 2, Peter delivers his first documented sermon, talking about how sons and daughters will share messages from God. He speaks longingly about how the young and old would see visions and dream dreams, all brought to them by God's Holy Spirit.

And amazing things did happen.

In today's second Scripture lesson, we hear what happens after the very first Pentecost in Acts 43-47:

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day-by-day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Despite what I do for a living, I am naturally skeptical about claims of supernatural activity. When I have interviewed people for church jobs who say they applied because

“God told them to,” I tend to scoot my chair back a little.

All too often when we hear about a Christian claiming that God spoke to them, they leveraged the claim for personal gain at best. Sadly, all too many have use God in a way that devastates the lives of others. On Sunday mornings when I stand in front of Calvary before worship (wearing my robe and stole) to greet people, it is interesting to see how passersby react. I have seen some cross the street to avoid the whole situation. Others walking their dog suddenly increase their pace from a leisurely stroll to set a new world record for speed walking.

I understand why people would be skeptical.

Not everyone runs away.

Some people hear the choir or the organ or trumpet and stop to listen. Others pause to read a sign about opportunities to help break cycles of poverty in our city.

You see, I am confident that God is still speaking.

The evidence of God's voice after the first Pentecost was selfless agape love.

People listened to each other and cared for each other.

I believe that the call of God's voice can be recognized where we encounter love.

Last Friday we celebrated the life of Bruce Michael Bambach. Some of you knew him as Bruce, others as Michael, so his family asked that I refer to him as Bruce Michael. Bruce Michael was a Deacon here at Calvary, and probably greeted many of you at the front doors as he served on our hospitality team. An aggressive neurological disease took him much faster than anyone would have imagined and his memorial service came together so quickly I know many of you are just finding out about his death, so I want to lift up his memory now.

Bruce Michael's family made it clear that he was not a selfless saint at all times, but his sister, Cheryl, shared a story about a time when God's love radiated from him. In his younger years, Bruce Michael taught on a Native American reservation in Montana. A group of boys from the reservation played on the basketball team. One night after a game the weather in the mountains became severe and the team needed to find lodging. They found a motel that had rooms available, but would only accept Bruce Michael. He did not consider it acceptable that the boys sleep in the cold bus and protested until the motel owner gave in and accepted everyone. Though his disease later took away his ability to speak in the way he wanted, God spoke through Bruce Michael that night.

Where there is selfless love, God's faithfulness speaks.

In our increasingly divided world, the vision set forth at the first Pentecost can seem like an unattainable fantasy.

In a moment, you'll hear the “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” made famous through Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Nearly 30 years before Dorothy found her way into so many hearts, L. Frank Baum described a utopian society as he wrote *The Emerald City of Oz*:

“Each man and woman, no matter what he or she produced for the good of the community, was supplied by the neighbors with food and clothing and a house and furniture and ornaments and games. If by chance the supply ever ran short, more was taken from the great storehouses of the Ruler, which were afterward filled up again when there was more of any article than the people needed.”

“So each one was proud to do all he could for his friends and neighbors, and was glad when they would accept the things he produced.”

Was Baum simply describing a fantasy world that can only be found over the rainbow, or an attainable ideal that can be found in the here and now? Let us revisit the book of Acts and life after the very first Pentecost:

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day-by-day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

People of God, you have the brains and the heart and the courage to bring the reality of faith to life in the here and now. Amen.

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