

*Come Holy Spirit, come like a fire and burn. Come like the wind and cleanse.  
Convict, convert and consecrate our lives to our great good and to your great glory.*

I grew up learning languages.  
Living in Berlin in early childhood, I learned German as I learned to speak.  
Living in Africa, and later in Switzerland, I studied French,  
Between those posts, we lived briefly in Rome and I picked up Italian.  
Don't expect me to speak any of those languages now!  
But because I knew those basic language families,  
I could usually pick up some of what was spoken around me when I traveled.  
Until I went to Denmark. I could make out nothing of what was being said.  
It was incredibly disorienting. Fortunately, Danes are about the nicest people  
in the world, and most speak English.

Maybe this is ow people who have not grown up with church or Christianity  
feel when they happen to wander into our buildings and services.  
We're all speaking Danish and they don't know what we're saying.  
Through the centuries when Christianity was the dominant religion and it was  
assumed that everyone "knew the story," we got used to using insider language  
and jargon, so that now – when many people do not know the Lord's Prayer,  
or what we mean when we say "Good Samaritan," or "Prodigal Son,"  
let alone eucharist, narthex, Nicene Creed, or absolution –  
many people don't know what the heck we're talking about.  
Do they even know we have an amazing story, wrapped inside all our words  
and rituals? A story that would help make sense of their stories?

If we want people to hear about Jesus' love for the world;  
if we want people to meet Jesus; if we want people to accept  
God's invitation to join God in making all things whole;  
we need to learn to tell our stories in languages they understand.  
That's what happened during worship that day of Pentecost – the disciples  
gathered there for worship didn't do anything. The Spirit filled them.  
And released in them a capacity to speak in languages they didn't naturally know.

That's always how the Spirit works in us – she releases in us gifts and passions.  
She opens our eyes to see Jesus more clearly,  
and to see the opportunities around us more precisely.

If we let him, he will open our hearts and release the language we need to tell our story, the story of God's love for this world, the way we feel our lives transformed in the light of that love.

What do you say when someone asks you why you're involved in a church? It's not a "given" anymore; people are often genuinely curious. Tell them! Develop your elevator speeches about the Jesus you worship.

How do you tell the story of why you are a Christian or a seeker? Why you're here? Some people, including many Episcopalians, think it's somehow impolite to talk about our faith. "It's private." Not in any New Testament I've ever read.

After the Spirit came on them at Pentecost, Jesus' disciples couldn't stop talking about Jesus and how he changed their story, even at risk of arrest, torture or death. If this is important to us, why would we keep it from people we care about? This good news is like any other in our lives – something we're excited about and want to tell.

How many of us are grandparents? How hard is it to get you to talk about your grandchildren? How long before the pictures and videos come out? Now, are you trying to convince other people to become grandparents? No! You're just excited and want to share it. You're filled with love and you want to share it. Can we be that excited about Jesus? How he's changing our stories for the better?

We are children of God, with boldness and grace given by the Holy Spirit. That's our story to tell – and each one of us tells it a little bit differently, as we are touched by the Spirit in our own ways. If I speak about the difference knowing Jesus makes in my life, I often talk about healing. Someone else might be more apt to talk about feeding the hungry. As you tell your story about the difference knowing Jesus makes in your life, it's going to emphasize your own twists and turns and priorities. No two stories of how God's love moves in our lives are exactly alike. But if we don't tell our stories, no one's going to hear the Good News. We are the only way it's going to get out – unless you want to leave it to televangelists and fundamentalists to represent our faith.

Knowing our stories and being committed to telling them is number one. Number two is – what language do we use?

It's good to know what language other people speak before we try to talk. If someone is really into a certain kind of music, or a sport, or sailing, that gives us a way in, as we invite them to connect to God around their interests. Someone whose greatest passion is their grandchildren might relate best to faith as a place children are nurtured. Someone who's energy goes to justice issues might join you in outreach and connect to Jesus' message of radical equality. I know a person who is deeply immersed in the story and mythology of Star Wars. How might I tell the Jesus story so that she can relate it to that narrative?

Does this sound like work? To study and learn another language so we can tell the story? Some missionaries do that, learn actual languages to share Good News. But look at the story we heard today – the apostles did not learn any languages. God did the work – they were filled with the Spirit and the Spirit gave them words. When we're in a situation where a conversation could get spiritual, let it! Go there. We can simply pray silently, "Come, Holy Spirit... give me the words."

In my twenties in New York, I knew a young man who was very ill and had been through a lot of trauma. He started going to my church, but he had no background in faith. We became friends – he was also very handsome; God uses all kinds of motives. We would go out for coffee and have these intense conversations and he'd pepper me with questions about God and Jesus and suffering and all that – sometimes I'd pray right in the middle of the conversation, "I got nothin' God!" And somehow I'd come out with a comment that totally got through and began to open his spirit. He became a very committed Christian and has led many others to faith by telling his story. God allowed me to speak his language.

God will accomplish God's purposes – but God chooses to do it through us. We need to be willing to be filled. We can't do it without God; God won't do it without us.

There are a lot of thirsty people out there, thirsty for spiritual connection. There are a lot of people who are tired of having all the emphasis on the material and the physical, who know there is a world of moral and spiritual values, who want to hear a story of being so deeply loved – and to love God back. We who believe need to drink deeply of the River of God, the Holy Spirit. And out of our hearts this living water will flow like a mighty river, renewing the earth. Let that river flow! *Amen.*

### **John 14:8-17**

Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

### **Acts 2:1-21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples 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? 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." 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. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: