

**“Hearing my language” a sermon based on Acts 2:1-21 preached on 24 May 2015,
Pentecost Sunday, at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright**

I was out on the street, and there was a kerfuffle. People were spilling out of a building and a crowd had gathered. I didn't know what was going on, so I moved closer, to the edge of the crowd. There was talk of rushing wind and tongues of fire. Amid the noise, I heard someone speaking my language with my accent. I pricked up my ears.

They were people unlike me, different from me, not from my place, but I understood what one of them said.

I've been in other places like that, where I was the only person who looked like me, and no one seemed to speak like me, and then I have heard someone speaking my language with my accent.

I read this story.

A woman was at O'Hare airport in Chicago, waiting for her flight, and across the sound system came a call for anyone who spoke Arabic to go to Gate 32. She had some time, so she went over there, and she found an older woman surrounded by officials. There were airport people and airline people and police and onlookers – a whole crowd of people trying to calm the woman. They surrounded her and were trying to explain to her that her flight had been delayed, but she did not understand. She just wanted to get on a plane. Around there were other people waiting for their flight, a little irritated there was a fuss. The helper went to the desk and the officials explained the woman had tried to get on a plane that was not hers and they had had to restrain her. The helper went over to the woman, and as soon as the woman heard her language, she changed. She explained that she had a boarding pass and it said to be at this gate at this time but these people, the officials, had stopped her from getting on the plane. She was upset because it was the first time she had been in the country, she did not speak English, and all these people were pressing on her and she thought she had done something wrong. She was terrified that she would miss her connecting flight to get her to the place where her son lived. Her son was waiting for her, and she had not seen him or his family for a long time. The helper explained that the plane had been delayed a little. She found out the son's phone number, phoned the son, explained what had happened and gave the phone to the woman. The two talked to each other. She found out that the woman came from a village not far from where her parents had lived once, a small village, and in an off chance she phoned her father, and then she gave the woman the phone and they discovered they knew people in common. By this stage the woman had become quite sociable and from her bag pulled out these sweets from her country, and started handing them around. Most of people waiting for the flight took one – the atmosphere had changed and people were conversing with each other.

The helper reflected on the difference in atmosphere from when she first went to the gate. A person was afraid, alone. Officials were frustrated and afraid of what the woman might

do. Bystanders stood back and didn't want to be involved. Now they were talking with each other and eating the woman's sweets.

A person heard her own language.

Anyway, here I am out on the street, with this kerfuffle and they talk about what is happening to them. I am not sure I know what they are offering – rushing wind, tongues of fire, messiness.

I go to a Church known for being decent and orderly, for care and caution, so I am not sure about this gift. I've had people give me things before where I wasn't sure what it was and whether I wanted it.

That awkward moment where you undo the ribbon, unwrap the paper, and wonder what it is. And the giver is looking to see how appreciative you will be.

Is it a pencil sharpener or a coffee grinder, a scarf or a napkin, earrings or fishing lures?

Finally, out of courtesy, you have to say something, so you say, "Oh, how could you have known? Thank you so much. I can really use a tire pressure gauge." Only to have a wounded voice say, "Tire gauge?! That's a meat thermometer!"

Anyway, that's how I feel out on the street.

You see, I am not sure I want what these people have to offer, whatever it is.

But I am interested in people who take me seriously, who speak my language with an accent I can understand.

It's less the words, and more the spirit - the spirit of who they are and how they behave. When people work to enter my world, when they try to sense my framework, when they make an effort to learn my language, and to see things from where I stand, I am inclined to give them a second thought. But if they are only interested in recruiting me for their organisation, on adding me to their number, on wanting to convince me of the worth of their approach, I am less interested.

So I was on the street, and a person made sense to me. They say it is the Spirit, the Spirit who is putting them where I am, how I see things, out here on the street.

I am willing to listen because much of my world is about my world. I focus on my screen. I mix with people like me. I talk with people who share my view. I am willing to listen to someone who takes me seriously.

It's not easy though, I know that. Even well-meaning people can without even trying silence me.

A friend of mine was holidaying with his family on a farm. They are town people, and they went for a walk. There was a group of farm workers talking away to each other. It was animated, engaging, and clearly very funny – lots of laughter, lots of ribbing. But as our

friend and his family came close to the group, the conversation slowed then stopped. The talking ceased. The laughter dissipated. The farm workers weren't sure how to speak or behave in the presence of these strangers.

It's easy to be silenced by people.

So here I am out on the street. And I have heard someone speak my language, with my accent, and in a way that does not silence me.

They say it's Pentecost.

This is what Scott Barton wrote of Pope Francis ...

It used to be that when the Pope
Would speak, he didn't speak to me;
He's always been the voice of judgment
And of high authority;
... But this Pope speaks a different line,
The Spirit has him in its grasp;
The lightness of his being shows
A man (like God?) in on the laugh
Of Christ, who doesn't spare the truth,
Yet always sees the world with grace.
All understand! And at his faith
And hope and love I am amazed.

He risks being misunderstood. He risks conversation. He risks his faith.

So I am out on the street, and I hear someone speaking good news, with my accent, my language. They don't silence me. They have a lightness of being. They have an interest in my world. They listen. And as I talk and they talk, there is connection. I sense the Spirit. It feels like wind blowing, like fire on my head. They say it's Pentecost. When the good news captivates me.