

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Sermon Title: "Can You Hear Me Now?"

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Have you ever had an encounter in your life with another person when you felt like the two of you were speaking different languages? An encounter where you were in fact speaking in the same tongue but still could not understand one another? One such moment for me occurred the very first time that I was going to be traveling into a new time zone and I was mesmerized by what it meant to "gain" an hour. I was at a family meal of some sort and the topic came up. One member of my family said that gaining an hour meant that you set your clock back and so your first day there in essence now consisted of 25 hours. And as a young teen, I understood what this family member was saying – I mean I always cherished the additional hour of sleep that I got every fall when daylight savings time was ending and I took full advantage of that little gift. So I understood the concept. However, for me using the word "gain" to describe this phenomena made no sense to me – shouldn't we talk about it differently? After all, we are subtracting an hour from clocks, and so I said that makes no sense! If you say you are gaining an hour, gain means to increase or to add something, so shouldn't we say we are gaining an hour when we add an hour to our clocks rather than subtract. And as you can probably imagine conversation went back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. Heck I get a little confused even retelling the story.

However, as I reflect back on that moment and that confusing conversation, I realize that I and my family member were speaking two different languages one might say. They were speaking from a place of practical explanation. I was speaking from a place of hypothetical pondering. They wanted to make sure that I had my watch set correctly. I wanted to debate the use of the word "gain" to describe the subtraction of something. And so every time we went back and forth on this topic, I thought we were having a light-hearted debate and that they were defending the word gain and I was encouraging another way. And they wanted to make sure – there motive was to make

sure - that my watch was set correctly. And so every time we went back and forth on this topic, they were probably very concerned about me because they heard me saying that it made more sense to turn my watch forward when one says gain and if I were to do that, I would be two hours early for everything. Again, as I am sure you can see, it got confusing quickly because, though we were speaking in the same tongue, our motive in that conversation and our inability to see the motive of the other made it feel like we were in fact speaking different languages.

And this sense of feeling like two people are speaking different languages can stem from a number of sources beyond motive. This can happen when communicating across generations - new lingo, new technology, new music, and more. This can happen when two people have grown up in a different cultures, for every community has its own culture, and this can impact the ways in which we communicate. This can also happen when two people have different ideologies or different core values and therefore find themselves speaking to what is important to them but not speaking in terms of the ideology and core values of the other to help translate the main point that they are trying to convey. And I am sure that you can think of other examples in life where you have felt like different languages were being spoken. But for whatever reason, in the end it feels like you are saying one thing, they are saying another, and neither of you feel understood or are able to understand the other. Have you ever had a moment like that?

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost and the gift that is the Holy Spirit, we hear once more of that moment when the Spirit came and the disciples were touched by these tongues of fire that allowed them to speak the languages of people from all over. And with this gift, the disciples were now ready to go forth and be Christ's witnesses in the world for they could now speak to each and all and everyone could hear them. Through the Holy Spirit, they were gifted with what they needed to live out the call of discipleship - to share this good news with all for linguistics would not divide. And in general, I would say that the church universal has done a pretty good job of this - with Bibles be

translated into nearly every possible language, with missionaries who learn a language and culture and literally go and share. The church on a whole has done some pretty amazing work of being guided by the Holy Spirit to not let the difference in words that we speak prevent the good news of Jesus from being shared. And yet, there is still much more for the Holy Spirit to reveal to us.

In our world today, language in a broad sense seems to consist of far more than linguistics, for there are so many things that impact our patterns of expression. Again, whether it is motive, or culture, whether it is generational or ideological, there are still many things in how we speak and express ourselves that can divide – but that shouldn't. For on Pentecost, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit that pulls the church of every tongue together. But how is the Holy Spirit calling us and guiding us to overcome these additional language obstacles that we encounter today?

I think we need to always be asking, “Can you hear me now?” For there are far too many miscommunications, far too many misunderstandings that lead to fractures in relationships – that lead to fractures in the church. And these miscommunications are not because we are speaking different tongues but that we are living a different language. And so, we need to pause frequently and ask, “Can you hear me now?” – not looking for the literal answer, but going deeper to see and explore if in fact we are communicating well. Are we speaking in a way that can be received by the person we are speaking with? And when we are, give thanks! And when we are not, pray that the Holy Spirit will teach us a new language so that nothing will divide. Pray that the Holy Spirit, that guides the church to witness to all, that guides the church beyond difference of linguistics, to also guide us beyond all the differences that arise in expression.

And so, I want to take us back for just a moment to that confusion conversation about “gaining” an hour because you may be wondering where did the conversation end when we were clearly talking past one another? It was ended by my uncle, who was a silent observer of this conversation. He noticed that this was getting nowhere and that we were not understanding one another, and so he brought us all back together using a

language that we all could hear – humor. When he noticed that our conversation was going nowhere, and my guess is that he probably also notice that we were speaking from different places, he wanted to get us to a place where we could be united once more. And so, from his corner of the room that was silent throughout this conversation, he said, “you know – gain is a funny word. Sometimes Gain is nothing more than a laundry detergent.” And we all laughed. I think he knew that we were not understanding, that we could not hear one another because we were in essence speaking a different language and so he brought us back together with humor – knowing that we both knew of the laundry detergent brand Gain and that we both appreciated a good laugh, he used language that we could both hear. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us and the church so that no difference in language, no difference in expression, will ever divide. Amen.