

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.



Acts 2:1-21

"We might all hear the same words - each in our own language - but we will not all hear and understand exactly the same meaning. The problem with life, and faith, and following Jesus is always: What does this mean?"

Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.



Year A, B, C
Pentecost Sunday
May 27, 2012

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Acts 2:1-21, The Message](#) or [Acts 2:1-21, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click here, [Acts 2:1-21](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "[All We Need Is Love](#)."

This text stands as a book end to the story of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

In Babel, the story begins with one language and a common understanding and purpose, but ends with many languages, confusion and scattering.

In Acts the story begins with many languages, and ends with many languages, but contains in the middle a common hearing about God's deeds of power (Verse 11).

Unfortunately, unlike the story of Babel, this story does not contain within it any cautionary tale against human hubris. It is absolutely crucial in reading this text aright to truly pause and ponder the question asked in Verse 12:

What does this mean?

The fact that the question gets asked, and that more than one explanation is offered, ("They're just drunk. No they're not.") ought to caution us that not even the full-on power of the Holy Spirit compels a common understanding.

We might all hear the same words - each in our own language - but we will not all hear and understand exactly the same meaning.

The "problem" with life is never just a technical one: If only we could all just speak the same language, we'd all get along. If we just keep talking, we'll all come to same understanding and our disagreements will go away; we'll be able to make a totally unanimous decision.

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The "problem" with life, and faith, and following Jesus is always: "What does this mean?"

And that, in a nut shell is what the last 2,000 years have been about.

I think I'll still stand by my Pentecost sermon as a reasonable take on this text: [When The Spirit Comes](#).

Check it out and see if you catch my meaning. ;-)

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* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;

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- and they shall prophesy.
- ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below, blood,
and fire, and smoky mist.
- ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
- ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
shall be saved.'

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Acts 2:1-21 (The Message)

¹ When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. ³ Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, ⁴ and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

⁵ There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. ⁶ When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. ⁷ They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans?" ⁸ How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?

- ⁹ Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;
Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;
Immigrants from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes;
Even Cretans and Arabs!

"They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"

¹² Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?"

¹³ Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine."

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¹⁴ That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. ¹⁵ These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

¹⁷ "In the Last Days," God says,

"I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:

Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters;

Your young men will see visions,
your old men dream dreams.

¹⁸ When the time comes,

I'll pour out my Spirit

On those who serve me, men and women both,
and they'll prophesy.

¹⁹ I'll set wonders in the sky above

and signs on the earth below,

Blood and fire and billowing smoke,

²⁰ the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,

Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;

²¹ And whoever calls out for help

to me, God, will be saved."

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