

Pentecost

The folks at Bethlehem and Zion have been listening to my stories about Chicago, Wrigley, and the Cubs for a long time. Now is as good a time as any to draw you in, too.

Any other Cubs fans here? I could talk about baseball and the Cubs for a lot longer than anyone who is not a fan will ever want to listen. To a non-fan, it's almost like a foreign language. But if I'm someplace outside of Wrigleyville – like here at home – and I hear someone talking about Pete Crow-Armstrong's knockout season, or the solidness of Cubs pitching, my ears perk up.

Depending on where I am, I might even join in the conversation. They're speaking my language.

Pentecost is about language. And there's more to language than just words.

The Chicago Transit Authority's Red Line train is the train that stops right outside Wrigley field. For a couple hours before a home game the Redline train is filled with excited baseball fans headed to the game.

It would be a whiter crowd than at other times. There would have been a mix of ages, including families with children. They would mostly not have been particularly poor.

There would have been happy faces and more chatter than usual. Many of them would be speaking the language of baseball.

A couple hours before that, many of the riders would have been the workers at Wrigley headed to their jobs there. Again, the crowd would have been a little mixed, but way more people of color than the fan crowd. And it would have been quieter.

On an ordinary working day at rush hour, the train is filled with workers and students heading to or from work or school. It's probably the time of day when the train is the most diverse in terms of race, age, and income level.

A couple years ago, I met a friend in Chicago to hang out for a few days. One evening we went to see a musical at the Chicago Theatre. After the show, we rode the Redline train back to the neighborhood where our AirBnB was.

At 10:30 at night the CTA Redline is a very different place. On a pretty full train car, my friend and I and two other people were the only white faces I could see. The passengers were mostly

male. The man sitting across from us was clearly intoxicated on something. He kept trying to say something but couldn't put a coherent sentence together.

Some looked like ordinary folks headed home from an evening shift job. There were no business suits in sight like there often are during rush hour.

The disheveled man next to me had an old suitcase and a plastic bag next to him. He slept. At least a couple of other people had what may well have been all their earthly belongings in garbage bags next to them. They slept too. Sometimes a couple hours on a train is the easiest way to catch a few zzz's when you have no place to lay your head.

It was the sort of crowd that sometimes makes people who have other options think twice about taking public transportation at night.

Many on the train that night probably could have used some good news. That's actually likely true no matter what time you ride the train.

I could have stood up and shared the good news of Jesus Christ. I wouldn't be the first person to do that on the L. I highly doubt there's ever been a single conversion on a train from someone standing up and preaching Jesus, but I could be wrong.

But also, I don't speak their language. Those folks on the train were people whose world is so different from mine we could be from different countries.

Maybe most of them spoke English, but that still doesn't mean I speak their language. I don't speak the language of being poor.

I don't speak the language of a life lived as a target of both institutional and personal racism.

I don't speak the language of homelessness and hunger.

I probably don't even speak the language of whatever home neighborhood some of them were headed to.

When Peter and Jesus' other disciples gathered on that Festival of Pentecost, a whole world of other people gathered in the city, too. They were immigrants from all over the Mediterranean region living in Jerusalem. They were from places where the language was different, where experiences and customs were different.

Peter and the others had an amazing story to tell...an amazing story of new life in Jesus Christ...good news of life out of death and a new way to live...a way of love and compassion. They had a story to tell of life with a God whose home is with us.

But if they'd just stood up and started telling that story before the Spirit's intervention, it would have had about the same effect as preaching on the L.

What the Spirit did was give them language so that those very different people could really hear the good news in a language they could understand.

We actually live in a state that is more diverse and with more languages than you might think. There are over 100 languages represented in Lincoln Public schools. There are towns in Nebraska where more than half the population speaks either Spanish or Somalian or Sudanese as well as English.

Even among English speakers, there are differences. The talk you might hear at Raymond Central High School is often very different from what you might hear in the hallways of Lincoln High. Even if they speak English. Different cultures have a language of their own.

One of the last conversations we had in confirmation class was about how to share our faith in our current time and place. And I have to confess, I'm not completely sure.

We live in a different time from Peter and the gathered disciples. The Christian story is now 2000 years old. It is still good news. But that message has been too often twisted and warped. Talking to random people about Jesus is often more likely to turn them away than draw them in.

But I do believe the Holy Spirit is still acting powerfully within us to share the good news of God's reign.

The Spirit will still guide us to the right language. That might mean literally learning a new language, depending on your setting. But the Spirit might first just prompt us to be curious. Curious about other cultures. Curious about the experiences of other people. Being curious before judging someone who is very different from ourselves.

The Spirit's guidance will make anything we might have to say about Jesus come out different if we have truly tried to understand another person.

In confirmation we spent this last year mostly learning about how to live in our world as a follower of Jesus. We spent several weeks on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and what it has to say to us today.

In our confirmation service, Oliver, Lucy, Morgan and Tori will affirm their call to live as Jesus taught, to participate in worship and the sacraments. They will affirm their call to serve...to tell others the good news of life in Christ...to work for justice.

It's a tall order.

But also during that rite, we will ask the Spirit to stir up in them what they need to answer that call.

The events of Pentecost tell us that we don't live this Christian life alone. We are empowered to live the way Jesus taught by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Oliver, Lucy, Morgan, and Tori - The Spirit was planted in you at baptism and that is affirmed today. The events of Pentecost created the church...a community of others also trying to live as Jesus followers. Together, by the Spirit, we share a message of love in a world that too often prefers judgment and hate.

The world sorely needs disciples of Jesus who are led by the Spirit. The world needs what the fruits of that spirit in us offer to the world...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.

Today, four young people will affirm that publicly. But it is a call we are all asked to answer daily. And so we pray, come Holy Spirit. Enliven us, empower us, and make us witnesses of your love to a hurting world.