

God grant us serenity to accept the things that we cannot change, courage to change the things that we can and the wisdom to know the difference. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

Before I begin preaching proper, I first wanted to just thank this congregation. COVID visited my house over the last couple of weeks. We were quarantined for the last two weeks. And today's my first day out, in 12 days. So, I'm feeling well, my family is all better. We're all back to normal.

I am continuing to mask and sort of keep distance from folks. And if you're wondering why I'm doing that, I'm just trying to take a little extra caution. I want to thank this church because throughout this time we've not felt alone. Even in our isolation, we've received notes and flowers and food and kindness and checking in and caring.

And it reminds me why we are church. We're having a baptism today. We're baptizing someone into the life of the church, and I am reminded of what the purpose of that is when I'm cared for and loved and when we're all cared for and loved in such a beautiful way. So, I want to thank you for that.

Today is the birthday of the church. The Feast of the Pentecost is the day that we celebrate the birth of the church. And I find that really interesting language. We don't acknowledge it as an anniversary. We don't acknowledge it as the day we commemorate the founding of a building, or the incorporation of specific bylaws.

We call it a birthday. We say that on this day, the Holy Spirit came down and the church was born. And I think that matters tremendously to how we understand ourselves, why we exist, and what is our purpose as a community of faith as a people called church. Because we have this idea that church is something that we made up and we chose.

You've often heard people say religion is man-made. It's something that we sort of created. But what's fascinating is in all the stories we have around the creation of the church is the idea of creating a community. Creating a whole people that were meant to have a specific way of being in the world was not actually on the minds of the disciples. It was something God planted in their minds. They didn't get together and say, "okay, we need to do some focus groups and we need to figure out how to make sure this message of this Jesus' 'doesn't get lost. We need to come up with a way to sort of get that out there." They were just trying to follow Jesus in their own lives.

And Jesus said, no, actually, you're going to make a community. You're going to build something out of this. In fact, people will oftentimes talk about the church being manmade, but then quote the Bible and say, the Bible comes directly from God. What's fascinating is, Jesus never tells anyone to write anything.

Jesus never says, make sure you get this and put it together and make it a book that everyone can memorize so that they get to go to heaven when they die. Jesus doesn't say those things, Jesus, doesn't say you need to have a book that says it all. What Jesus says is, be a church. Jesus says become a people who belong to each other, create communities of belonging, where people can know their belovedness by the God who made them.

And so today we celebrate the birthday of the Church. Again, not as the day when the people got together and said, I have an idea. But as the day when the people got together and the Holy Spirit came

down and visited them, breathed upon them, lit them up with fire and sent them into the world. This is a fascinating idea for us as Christians, because again, we sort of think, oh, I chose this life.

And yet. The story we have today is that this life is chosen for us. That in fact, if we are Christian, we don't have much of a say. It is in our very DNA. It is in the founding principles. It is in our birth as a Church that we are meant to go out into this world and to love this world in Jesus' name.

Otto is not choosing to be baptized today. He has no say in it. In fact, he might scream and wriggle and cry and say no, and we're still totally going to baptize him. Why? Because we understand baptism not as something he is doing for himself but as something that God is doing in his life, as God is working in all our lives.

Today is the birthday of the Church and we have as much say over the birth of the Church, as we have say, over our own births in this world. We have been brought into this world and the reality is those of us who are here have been brought together as the body of Christ. And we have a reason for being, and today we celebrate that reason.

What is that reason? Why do we exist? I'm fond of just answering that with just saying Jesus and moving right on. But you notice that the birthday of the Church is on Pentecost, and Jesus isn't mentioned today. The Holy Spirit is mentioned today. There are so many other days that I think would have been better birthdays, frankly.

I mean, Christmas would have been a great birthday for the Church, right? It's already Jesus' birthday. We could be birthday twinning with Jesus. That would be kind of cool, right? There are more people who come to Church on Christmas than on Pentecost. It'd be great. We'd already be full and be like, see it's our birthday. Jesus is born. We're born. The whole thing. It's great. That doesn't work.

We could go with Easter also a very packed day. We like those. But Easter is also the day of the resurrection. This is the day that makes sense for us. Maybe we say, oh, we become the Church when we remember the resurrection. Or maybe if you're like into the more obscure Christian Feasts, which I know many of you are, you could go for Ascension Day. That's the day that Jesus started working from home. I don't know if you know about that one. He got a zoom account. The whole thing worked out. He goes up we're down here. This is the day where we go okay, we're on our own, let's start a church.

And yet that is not the birthday of the Church. The birthday of the Church is Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit shows up and animates this body of believers and gives us a purpose in the world. And if you want to know what our purpose is, look no further than the story you heard today.

The Holy Spirit rushes like a wind into the room and lights, like little tongues of flame, on top of the believers, on top of the heads of the disciples. And in that moment, what do they do? What is the symbol of the birth of the Church? In that moment they begin to speak the Gospel. The truth of God's love in this world, the truth of every single person's belongingness to God in this world. They begin to speak it in whatever language the people around them speak.

Pattie read this long list of all these different places from which people come. All these different languages, all these different cultures are present. And all of a sudden, the disciples are speaking. All the disciples, by the way. Their first language is probably Hebrew or Aramaic, which is a dialect of Hebrew. And instead of speaking the Gospel in their own language, they're now speaking the language in

whatever language, the people around them speak. The first thing the Holy Spirit does to make people Church, is turn them outward and give them a language to speak love to others in whatever way they will understand.

Please notice that the Holy Spirit does not make it so everyone else in the room understand the disciples when they speak in their native language. It is historically culturally the custom of a lot of churches to try to make the world look more like us and speak more like us and learn our language.

But in the story we have today, the birth of the Church happens when the people who love God are turned outward and learn how to speak other people's language. This is a super supreme act of vulnerability, by the way, have you ever tried to learn another language?

You feel good about yourself, and then you're face-to-face with someone and you're like, this is terrible. I'm going to totally screw this up. My wife right now is doing Duolingo, the Pentecostal app you've heard of. Duolingo where you learn other languages? And she's learning Italian because next year I'm going on sabbatical with our family.

We're going to go to Italy for a little bit so she's learning Italian. And it's really beautiful to watch her because she gets all excited. But then along with that excitement comes a little bit of nervousness of, am I getting this right? I don't want to screw this up. And what if we get there and I can't say anything and it's embarrassing?

This is how we all are with the people in this world. We wish that they would speak our language because we're nervous about someone else's language. And you can tell now I'm not just talking about Italian, French, Spanish, Chinese. Every single person you meet speaks a different language than you. If you've ever tried to cohabit with another person, you know, that's true. And wouldn't it be great if the Holy Spirit came down and made everybody else able to understand you better?

That is not the birth of the Church. The birth of the Church is when God enters our hearts and enables us to look outside ourselves. When the Holy Spirit shows up and gives us the power to see this world as beloved and then enables us to speak in whatever language, the people around us speak, so that they can understand their belonging.

This is the birth of the church. A People gathered together and then turned outward. A People who are gathered together in love, but then empowered to send that love out. A People who are taught to love this world as it is and not as we want it to be. A People who are taught to speak love to this world in whatever language it will take. We're all in different places about that. We all understand love differently.

I'm going to come back to Otto for a second. You can say anything you want to him. He's not going to get it. You can try to explain to him that he's safe and warm and everything's okay. But if he's not feeling it, he's not feeling it.

And so, love becomes about feeding him and swaddling him, and sometimes rocking him. But you got to do that, that thing, right? He's got to feel loved and you have to figure out whatever language that is to make him feel loved, which drives you crazy. And that's why we need God.

We need God to help us speak, the language of whoever is right in front of us. We cannot do it on our own. We need God to remind us that we are not just choosing to try to be good people, but that we

were brought into this world to fill this world with love. And the way we love this world is by speaking the language of the people who need to know their belonging. Whatever that language is.

We were made by God on purpose. We exist for a reason. We were born as people and born as a church so that we can give love to each other and to the people around us, to this world. So that we can participate with God in the healing of the world that God loves, by the power of love.

So, as you go about your week, I just want to ask you what languages will you learn?

How will you learn to look outside yourself? To speak love so that others can understand it. How will you seek not to be understood, but to understand others, to listen to them in the ways that they speak and then speak the truth of their belovedness in a way that they can hear. This is the work of a lifetime.