

For the last 20 years, I've been in some stage of learning Spanish. I started like a lot of people do in high school, taking Spanish all four years and little by little, learning the basics. In college, I continued and took a few semesters, but after that, I never took any more classes. But, from time to time, I'd decide "I'm going to study and learn Spanish." I'd start watching Spanish-language TV shows, listening to Spanish-language podcasts, and reading the news in Spanish. Or at least for a few weeks. Then, little by little, I'd watch and listen and read a little less until I was back in English and my idea to learn Spanish went away.

However, all this has changed in the last few years. In 2019, my wife and I began the process to become foster parents through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee services for children who are caught up in our immigration system who primarily come through our southern border. It started again: I'm going to learn Spanish! And for a while, I started again – watching, listening, reading in Spanish. We were licensed in February of 2020, and we all know what happened in March, so keeping it short, it took a while for us to receive our first placement that December. And I found myself reading, watching, and listening in Spanish less and less, but finally, after a lot of waiting, we received our first placement.

This was a new situation – and I had two options: First, I could communicate what I needed to and hear what I needed to in Spanish, or second, I couldn't communicate or understand at all. So I learned and I learned quick! There was a new urgency to learning Spanish that I didn't have before, and to learn was not optional!

Today is Pentecost. Today, the church remembers the miracle that the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. And each who heard, heard in their own languages.

There's a lot to this story, but I'm going to focus on this part: The gift of the languages was given to ordinary people. Without a doubt, the disciples were called specially by God for all of their ministry. But at the same time, these were fishermen, tax collectors, and other workers. They weren't the elite, the most educated, the most different. And the gift of Pentecost is that the gift of the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and the whole church. Not just that they could speak other languages; now, the miracle is that the voice of God wasn't limited to a voice from heaven. It was in the hearts of all the believers, and the voice from heaven was heard through the mouths of these normal men.

I know we hear about the languages, and see that miracle as the most visible that is in front of us in the text. We wonder what it might sound like to hear that ourselves. But the real miracle is the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, spoken through the mouths of ordinary people. This is the true gift and responsibility for us, too. We believe we have the same gift from God: The Holy Spirit working in the life of the church. We have the same mission as the disciples that Jesus gave in the final verses of Matthew: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As part of this church, and with the of the Spirit we have received, we are part of the mission of God in the world.

With this gift of the Holy Spirit, there is a responsibility to tell to all the story of Jesus and the salvation that he brought to the world. This message is transformative, and is not just a promise in the next world, but good news for all that changes our lives in this world.

It is obvious, in what is now a bilingual home, my need to really learn Spanish. It hits you hard the first time you realize there's an 8 year old looking at you and expecting you to be able to talk to them and tell them what's next and you're struggling to find the right words. There's a real sense of urgency, let me tell you that.

However, I hope it is just as obvious to us all, when we look at the world: There are a whole lot of people who need to hear the good news of God's grace in their lives. With all that is in the news, every day we see people and situations that obviously need the transformation that comes only from God. And we don't need to watch the television to see that – it's in all of our communities. I'd hazard to say each of us knows someone who could benefit from the gift of Christian community and fellowship, whose life would be positively touched with a kind word. And, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, all of us have the gift.

But at the same time, I see in many churches the lack of urgency to share these gifts with the world. We see the challenges, we know and have found an answer for ourselves; yet we struggle to share that with others. We see the problems of the world, we pray, but we are not ourselves prepared to share the good news we have found. We have this gift of God – the Holy Spirit that can speak through us – and we struggle to use it. I hear a lot of, "That's for the pastor," or "I don't know what to say." As the baptized of God – we all have a responsibility to embrace this gift of the Holy Spirit to speak.

With this responsibility is ultimately a promise. We are not alone in the world without God's help. With the gift of the Holy spirit, the church is not alone in the world. In the first

chapter of John, John the Baptist saw Jesus, and said “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” On this day of Pentecost, we see the beginnings of this work continuing in the life of the church. As the church who has received the gifts of the holy spirit, this means that you and I are not helpless in the face of the many challenges of the world. When we see all the problems of the world and our lives, we are not completely unable to do anything because we have the Holy Spirit with us. I don’t want to say this means everything will always and forever be easy – scripture tells us otherwise – but the work that we do is important, meaningful, and moves us ever closer to the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

For me, it was a change in my thinking when I realized that Pentecost, the gift of the spirit and the call to use the language God gives us to tell people about the Gospel was a promise and not a scolding. It’s not just a “go and proclaim the gospel!” It’s the promise of the Gospel, with real consequences. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means that when we proclaim the gospel, God is with us, working with us. It is the promise that when we take this responsibility seriously, when we live in this new reality of Christ, the world can and does change. The Day of Pentecost was not a miracle that happened once and never more. The miracles of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers happen every day. It is the foundation of the church and the foundation of our lives and faith. God IS WITH US. And when we live in that hope and reality, it changes us to change the world.

With the gifts of the Spirit and with the works of God through our hands, we celebrate today the reality that our proclamation of the Gospel can change the world. When there is war, poverty, violence, and all the struggles of life throughout the world, and when these problems exist in our own communities, I hope that we can see the urgency before us and the promise that God’s work is here among us! On that first day of Pentecost, through the mouths of 12 men, God changed the world. And for 2000 years, God has used the believers to grow the church and through the church God has changed the world. We celebrate today because we TRUST and BELIEVE that today this gift of the spirit continues, and that when we proclaim God’s goodness and work with God, we do indeed make a difference. AMEN.