



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

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Pentecost Sunday—Acts 2:1-4 and Galatians 5:16-26

One of my favorite comic routines is the classic “Who’s on first?” bit by Abbot and Costello. It is a remarkable example of brilliant writing delivered with impeccable timing. According to the Baseball Almanac: “The general premise behind the exchange has Costello, a peanut vendor named Sebastion Dinwiddle, talking to Abbott who is Dexter Broadhurt, the manager of the mythical St. Louis Wolves. However, before Costello can get behind the plate, Abbott wants to make sure he knows everyone’s name on the team...”

Of course, the players have odd names, and the comedy comes from the trials and miscommunications of trying to explain that the first baseman’s actual name is “Who.” Jimmy Fallon recently updated the bit and used Billy Crystal as the aforementioned Who and Jerry Seinfeld as the Third Baseman whose name is I Don’t Know.

It is a classic example of two people speaking the same language while not at all communicating. The miracle of Pentecost is often couched in terms of “speaking in tongues.” The reality however, is that the miracle was not about speaking foreign languages so much as the Spirit empowering the first disciples to *communicate*. Communication is difficult. Communication in a common language is difficult. Communication among a diverse group of people with different backgrounds, customs, foods, parenting styles, clothing, music, and values can be downright miraculous.

It took a miracle of the Holy Spirit to get the first apostles out in the public sphere and communicate the good news of Christ to all of those who were gathered there.

And it takes a miracle of the Holy Spirit today to help the church grow in to the community which we are called to be – the beloved community of diverse cultures, languages, races, genders, orientations, and socio-economic classes.

We have been studying Paul’s letter to the Galatians for the last few weeks, and today we come to his important conclusion. He has been laying out his argument for several chapters. It is an argument based on Scripture, tradition, reason, and his own experience of the Holy Spirit. It is an argument which can be summarized as this: “Stop harming the beloved community of diverse people who have found power in Christ. The Spirit is moving in all of these people. Who are we to keep them out of this movement?”

In this final part of Paul’s letter he reminds the people of what truly matters – the Spirit. The same Spirit that broke down barriers on the Day of Pentecost is the Spirit that keeps the community together today. The fruit of the Spirit is the glue of community. If you read the text in the Common English Bible (my preferred version) you will see the traditional phrase “sins of the flesh” translated to “selfish desires.”

This exhibits a deeper understanding of what Paul is communicating. The sin he wants to avoid is selfishness. These are the things which harm community – which harm others and break trust. The fruit of the Spirit are those things that encourage community – patience, kindness, and compassion. And while most would agree that the fruits of the Spirit are desirable, we also must recognize that showing them all the time can be downright miraculous.

There are plenty of times when I could easily succumb to my selfish desires. Kindness and patience are hard sometimes. That is why we have the Holy Spirit – it is the power that enables these fruits to flourish.

