

Acts 2:1-21
Pentecost Midweek + June 12, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Ed Brandt
"Hearing Is Believing"

What does it take to get your attention? That might be a risky question for a preacher or teacher to ask. The unfortunate response might be, "I don't know." If you think about it, that response means that you haven't yet gotten their attention. The goal of any spoken communication is not just that words are heard, but that the message is understood and believed. Understanding and acceptance are needed before words can impact people's lives and change their actions.

Getting people's attention is the key to effective communication. The ball game on TV or the newspaper used to be challenges to effective communication. But handheld devices have become a far greater challenge. The job of a preacher or teacher is especially challenging in a time when people are conditioned to receive information in short, visual images. Yet in every time and circumstance, the Holy Spirit works powerfully through the Word to bring understanding.

But in all sorts of circumstances the message doesn't get across. Communication breaks down. Parents tell their children over and over to finish their jobs around the house, but it usually doesn't happen until they get their attention with more drastic measures. Teens may not hear the message to drive responsibly until they are grounded. Many mistakes on the job are made because workers thought they could figure it out themselves and didn't listen to directions. Too often we abuse words by not listening to them carefully or by treating them too casually. This attitude is spiritually risky because, as the miracle of Pentecost announces, the careful speaking and hearing of the Word means salvation. The message of Pentecost is that hearing is believing.

As the disciples gathered together on the first Pentecost, the stage was set for some effective communication. Christ's work of salvation was done. His perfect life was lived, and His death and resurrection to secure forgiveness and new life were now in the past. There was an exciting message to be communicated. People needed to hear and know that forgiveness, life, and salvation were made available freely to everyone and could be received by hearing and believing. In order to get the message across, God used Spirit-directed words that could be heard. On that special day God wanted to get people's attention, so He used something visual and extraordinary. The Spirit came in a miraculous way to get people to pay attention. If this place were suddenly filled with the shriek of hurricane force winds and I had a tongue of fire on top of my head, I guarantee no one would be dozing off or day-dreaming. But the real miracle of Pentecost was one of both speaking and hearing.

By the Spirit's power the apostles were enabled to speak meaningful language that was foreign to them. It was not ecstatic, unintelligible sounds, but rather speech that was understood by those from different parts of the world. Most of the listeners heard and believed the Spirit's words spoken through the disciples.

But for some, the Spirit's words did not get through. They made fun of the miraculous event with the foolish explanation that the disciples were drunk. In our interaction with one another today, often there is a breakdown in communication. For many reasons there is misunderstanding or refusal to accept the message that is conveyed. Hearing and believing fail to take place. That's how it was that first Pentecost. Not everyone heard and believed.

Of course, there are times when we should be cautious about what we hear. Do you believe everything you hear? I would guess that most would quickly answer no. You have heard advertisements for health products and labor-saving inventions that are obviously too good to be true. In this time when "fake news" has become a common phrase and two vastly different world views are apparent in the media, it would be impossible to answer, "Yes, I believe everything I hear." Before believing what we hear, we must consider whether the source is dependable.

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:12, "*We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God.*" As words come into our ears and mind, we must determine the source. That is called discernment, and it is an important ability for Christians to have and practice, not just with political commentary, but also with messages of a spiritual nature. Too often we are lacking in discernment and allow false and misleading messages to influence us. Regardless of your age, when you are tempted to have sex outside of marriage, or abuse alcohol, drugs, or other substances, or become infrequent in worship attendance, don't listen to the spirit of the world which says that such things must be ok because everyone else is doing it. Instead, listen to the Spirit-directed words of Scripture, which warn against these sins and every sin.

When you hear that you can be worthy of God's blessing by your own keeping of laws and ordinances, don't listen to the spirit of the world, which says that you can work your way to the Father. Instead, listen to the Spirit's Gospel word which promises life and salvation as a free gift earned for us by Christ and received through Spirit-empowered faith. When you are tempted to reject the teaching of your church drawn from the Bible, don't listen to the spirit of the world, which says that you can determine your own truth, that it doesn't matter which church you attend, and that it's most important to fit in with what the world says. Instead, listen, hear and believe the clear truths given in the Spirit-inspired Word.

It used to be said that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach. The gal who could bake a tasty pie and prepare a hearty meal had an advantage in catching a guy. If that was ever true, I doubt whether it holds true any longer with our tendency to eat out so often. Rather than working through the mouth and stomach, the Spirit continues to enter the hearts of people through the ears and mind. God's Word spoken and heard is effective only when the Spirit controls both the speaker and listener. The Spirit is what gives the gospel its power, not the polish of the speaker. The result of believing happens only when the Spirit works in the heart of the hearer. When faith is present in a person, only the Holy Spirit can take the credit. Our coming to faith or remaining in the faith is never the result of our own striving. 1 Cor 12:2 clearly states, "*No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*" And when faith does not happen, or a person loses faith, only the person is responsible, because they reject the Word and resist the Holy Spirit.

Communication involves both speaking and listening. The message won't get through if either side of the exchange is missing. Whether between husband and wife, parents and children, teacher and student, or pastor and congregation, for good communication to take place, both sides have to be turned on and tuned in. The Holy Spirit opens both mouths and ears. People can never speak the things of God or listen to them without His power. The Spirit guides the preparation of what is spoken in the sermon. And the Spirit assists the listeners in concentrating and understanding the message and applying it to their lives. Unfortunately, our human weaknesses get in the way of effective communication on both sides of the exchange. But the Spirit continues to work and overcomes our failings so that faith is nourished and sustained.

Much of our human communication is simply the passing on of information or the sharing of emotions. Spirit-directed words are for more than just imparting knowledge and making people feel good. They are for saving. The message of the Spirit announces salvation. After Peter explained the miraculous events of the first Pentecost as the fulfillment of Scripture, he

went on to proclaim the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Then he spoke a powerful law/gospel message, "*God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" This Spirit-directed word had the desired effect. The people implored Peter and the other apostles, "*Brothers, what must we do to be saved?*" The sweet message of relief was this: "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" 3000 people heard and believed and called on the name of the Lord that day and were saved.

The work of the Spirit continues today, although using less dramatic methods. The life-giving Spirit comes to us here and now in our sorrow, weakness, and fear. Through the Gospel word of promise, the Spirit brings comfort and hope. The Spirit comes to settled and secure Christians, reminding us that the peace which is beyond understanding comes from outside ourselves, from God. And He comes to us in our complacency and inaction to stir us to greater awareness, gratitude, involvement, and response.

Regardless of how we may have listened to the spirit of the world and broken God's command by what we've done or not done, when we turn to God in repentance the Spirit of God communicates complete forgiveness based on the merits of Christ. Tonight the Spirit's work is not restricted to the sense of hearing. In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, God's love and forgiveness are communicated through all five senses. In our tasting, smelling, touching, and seeing the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine, the Spirit adds to our hearing the words of promise and convinces us that our salvation is sure.

Yes, hearing is believing, but it doesn't stop there. Those who have heard, believed, and been saved will joyfully speak the Word and be involved in the Spirit's work of saving others. You undoubtedly have people in your lives whom the Spirit could draw closer to the saving Christ through your friendship and speaking of Him. Our hearing the Word together here in worship and being strengthened in the faith we confess, is meant to affect our lives throughout the week. All of us, wherever our daily routine takes us, can fit in with the Spirit's work. In your families, at your work, in your relationships with friends, remember that God has a role for you to play. God's plan of salvation, which has come to us through the Spirit-directed hearing of His Word, includes using us. We who have heard can speak, so that others by hearing may also believe. O Holy Spirit, use us as your witnesses, for Jesus' sake. Amen.