

**God Speaks Spanish (Acts 1:1-11; 2:1-13)**

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**Mark Archibald**

Sometimes Jesus says things that don't make a lot of sense.

Jesus always says things that are true.

But he doesn't always say things that make a lot of sense.

It's fun to imagine the look of the faces of the disciples when Jesus teaches some things. Did they sometimes look puzzled? Confused?

Or did they keep a blank, dignified expression on their faces – while internally losing their minds?

What was the look on the disciples' faces when Jesus dropped this nugget on them?

***“Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away.”*** (John 16:7)

“Yes, disciples, you've given up years of your lives to follow me. You want to follow me all the way to the end. You spend all of your time with me. BUT. It is better for you if I go away.

How does that possibly sound like good news?

Here's the sentence in context. Jesus says,

***“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. <sup>3</sup> They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup> I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, <sup>5</sup> but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup> Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. <sup>7</sup> But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*** (John 16:1-11)

Jesus tells the disciples they will get kicked out of church, killed, despised and given a bad reputation. But don't worry – he's leaving you to deal with this. Jesus will be long gone.

But of course he doesn't stop there. Jesus goes on to say that he is leaving an Advocate – the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit can only join them if Jesus leaves.

It still seems like a weird idea. Again, I'd love to see the disciples faces as Jesus teaches these things. "It's better for you if I go away. . . ." But he really means what he says – it is better for them that he leave and the Holy Spirit comes.

Not long after Jesus teaches these things, things get crazy.

- Jesus is betrayed. Jesus is put on trial. The confused disciples scatter. Some even deny knowing Jesus at all.
- Jesus is executed. Jesus is crucified. The disciples are inconsolable and confused. They have lost everything.
- Jesus rises from the dead. The followers of Jesus rejoice!

But then there is this long, awkward period between Jesus rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. If you read the post resurrection stories of Jesus, the disciples don't seem to know what to do with themselves. They don't seem to know what to do with Jesus. This seems to be the most boring and awkward time of Jesus ministry. There's a cloud of confusion hovering over these post-resurrection events.

But then Jesus leaves. Days later the Holy Spirit comes to all the followers of Jesus. And nothing is ever the same again.

We call the arrival of the Holy Spirit "Pentecost". In many churches we are familiar with, we don't do much with Pentecost. The important days in our church calendar are Christmas (Jesus comes to earth), Good Friday (Jesus dies on our behalf) and Easter (Jesus rises from the dead). We don't make much of Pentecost.

I have come across teaching this year suggesting that Pentecost should be considered more important than Christmas. This is when the Holy Spirit empowers the church. Christmas is the arrival of Jesus – Pentecost is the fulfilment of his arrival.

I think I've even come across a statement that Pentecost should maybe be considered more important than Easter! MORE IMPORTANT THAN EASTER?!?!? How?!

The thinking is that the resurrection of Jesus happens at Easter. But that that full meaning of the resurrection happens when the church is born, empowered, and mobilized by the Holy Spirit.

*"The crowning evidence that Jesus was alive was not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship. Not a rolled away stone, but a carried away church."* (Clarence Jordan) The arrival of the Holy Spirit is the crowning evidence that the resurrection is true, and through the Holy Spirit, the church communicates the reality of resurrection around the world.

The Holy Spirit arrives to the disciples in spectacular fashion. One of the very first things the Holy Spirit mobilizes people to do is speak in other languages.

This is immediate! Right from the start this miraculous communication happens and people from a variety of cultures and languages hear the good news of Jesus in their language.

This is about more than communication. The people visiting Jerusalem would have some language in common. Those visiting the temple would do so under one language. When the Holy Spirit makes the believers speak in other languages, this is not just the language of communication, but something more. "If you talk to a person in a language they understand, it goes to their head. If you talk to them their own language, that goes to their heart." (Nelson Mandela) The Holy Spirit helps the disciples communicate in the heart language of the people visiting Jerusalem.

The value of language is not lost on us. Many of us have experience in multiple languages. I talked with a few people about the intersection of Christian faith and language. We're going to hear from Gord, Marie and Racheal on church, language, and the communication of the Holy Spirit.

Gord Hunt has had numerous experiences in languages outside of his native language of English. Gord and I had a conversation about the challenges of communicating, living and worshipping in another language. In what you will hear from our interview, Gord talks about both the barrier that language can be, but also the ability of the Holy Spirit to communicate beyond that barrier. **[VIDEO]**

We have a number of Karen people that attend First B. These Karen families were in Myanmar, then had to live as refugees in refugee camps in other countries before finally arriving in Canada. I asked Marie, one of our Karen members, about the difference between worshipping in her own language and attending worship services in English.

I assumed I would hear an answer like, "Attending worship in English at First B is fine, but it is so much sweeter to be able to worship and pray in our own language!" That is not the answer I received at all! Here was Marie's answer to me, after she also spoke with other Karen members.

***Worshipping to me is communicating with God by praying, singing, listening to his words, giving thanks and sharing his words with others. At any worshipping service (doesn't matter what language it is) I feel that I am filled with joy that I am with Him and that I am not alone. Even when I am at a worshipping service that is in a language that I don't understand, I feel the Holy Spirit, His presence. It's just amazing to worship.***

***A few Karen fellows feel about the same, some said even sometimes they don't understand English very well, they feel the presence of God when they are at a worshipping service, and worshipping is gathering together to glory Him. And it doesn't matter what language we glory and praise Him. He understands all of us.***

The Holy Spirit does speak in our languages. But the Holy Spirit also transcends language as well. Even if we don't fully understand all that's being said to us, the Holy Spirit intervenes and is present. The Holy Spirit reminds us we are not alone.

I spoke with Racheal about her experiences with prayer in different cultures. Racheal is originally from Nigeria. When she first attended our church services, she would hear people pray and wonder, "What's

going on?” There was (seemingly) no passion in prayer. Did we realize who we were speaking to? Then she began to recognize the Holy Spirit in many cultural forms of prayer.

***“I have spent 5 years in Canada and now used to the quiet style of prayer here with just one Amen said at the end of prayer unlike the vigorous style of prayer with loud Amens said at the end of each sentence that I was previously used to back in Nigeria. I have seen firsthand how the Holy Spirit listens to me, speaks to me and answers my prayer regardless of how I choose to pray. Praying in the Western (Canadian) way or African (Nigerian) way doesn't make the Holy Spirit less present in my life . (Racheal)***

One of the First acts of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts was to share the Gospel in people’s own languages. The Holy Spirit spoke the language of people’s culture and people’s hearts.

The Holy Spirit was also at work when Peter addressed the whole crowd in only one language, most likely in Aramaic.

The Holy Spirit will communicate the love of Christ in a people’s specific language and culture.

The Holy Spirit is also going to move when language and culture feels like a barrier.

Regardless of our heart language or our culture – the Holy Spirit speaks to us and reminds us we are not alone. Thank you to Jesus, for leaving the Holy Spirit with us all until our work on earth is done.