

**A Sermon for Pentecost Sunday
June 8, 2025**



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[Day of Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Acts 2:1-21

Language and Community

We have just heard the breath-taking reading about the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon a whole crowd of people, taking their multiple languages and enabling all the people to talk to each other and understand each other, making a whole new community. I love this reading!

It reminds me of another story, more recent, that may speak to you also. Back in 1972, I had just moved to a small town, Nacogdoches, Texas, so that my first husband could complete his bachelor's degree at Stephen F. Austin State University. We had moved there after four years in West Berlin, and so moving to East Texas was something of a culture shock. Still, I was determined to remain chipper and learn what I could. I enrolled in the university for French language courses, something I needed as a budding opera singer, and just to keep me out of trouble, I took a part-time job as society editor of the local newspaper. In that capacity, I often received notices of local groups and their meetings. It took me a while to understand the local dialect – memorably, one lady called to tell me about her church that was holding a “sanging.” “Sanging? Uh, could you spell that?” “No, honey, it's just a sanging.” Eventually, I figured out that she meant a “singing,” a community musical event. Ah so. A singing. I also received meeting notices for groups of which I had previously had no knowledge, such as the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and the Daughters of the Confederacy. I tried to remain polite and nonjudgmental.

Then, one day, I received a written notice about a cultural group, accompanied by a photo of several women lounging in a garden. The story was about a new women's group called the Society of the Belles Arts.

You will recall that I was taking courses in French language, and I was a bit confused by the name of the group – I had heard of the Beaux Arts, meaning the beautiful arts, but these women had named their group the Belles Arts – grammatically it didn't make sense. So I called them up. It turned out that the women were all bored faculty wives, their husbands being professors at the local university, and they thought they would just make fun of this hick town and the hick town newspaper by submitting an article that was a joke. Ha! I caught them!

But even better, we became friends. Brought together by a grammatical error, we found that we had many things in common. Rather than being bored, they became engaged in improving the town. I was their willing accomplice, writing up the ideas as they occurred to us, promoting good things in the newspaper, such as a new public library and a holiday Empty Stocking Fund. From a confusion of languages came common

understanding and worthwhile goals for the common good, and best of all, true community and friendship. Yes, it is a Pentecost story!

So, here's an idea for Pentecost, not just for today but, say, for the next six months or longer. Listen carefully to everyone you talk with, and try to be polite and nonjudgmental. Try to hear what they are really saying and listen for common concerns among all of us.

For example, you are among a group of people you don't really know very well, perhaps volunteering at the Lake library organizing books, and while eating lunch, the conversation turns to politics. This might be a challenge, but try to be polite and nonjudgmental, and try to find common threads in your discussion.

Or, suppose you decide to volunteer at the Stark Pride March next Saturday (most of our Episcopal churches will be represented there) and someone calls you out with an ugly epithet. Think about how you could respond in a way that encourages communication, not rancor.

We are about the business of community-building, on all levels – church, Lake library, Stark County, and our nation. Let us learn to communicate and promote understanding. Then we will truly be doing the work of the Holy Spirit.