

Pentecost

June 4, 2017

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM

Pastor Bill Mann

When I first came to Loudoun County I met an older black woman. She was a minister. Her name was Leontine Kelly and she was filling in at a local Methodist Church. She told me, "I lived in Cincinnati, I lived in San Francisco, but I was born in Washington, D.C." Later I discovered that Leontine Kelly was the first black woman ever elected as bishop of the Methodist Church." She told me this story about when she was growing up. Leontine's father was a minister and he had a church down in the Over-the-Rhine area in Cincinnati. Leontine was just 8-years-old at the time. She and her family lived in the parsonage next to the church. One day, when her parents were out shopping, Leontine's brothers were teasing her. "Teenie," they said (that's what they called her), "come down here in the cellar. We found something we want to show you." Curious, Teenie started down the cellar steps. Can you guess what her brothers found?--a hole in the cellar floor next to the old furnace. Brothers will be brothers. They needed someone smaller than they were to help with the exploration. So, they grabbed Teenie by her ankles and, holding her upside-down, they began to lower her into the hole in the floor. Somewhere in the middle of Teenie's terrified screams her parents came home. Hoping to get her brothers into a world of trouble, she reported her brothers' crimes and what they had done to her. To her surprise, her father seemed excited—not angry. "I think we've found

something!” he exclaimed. Then, without saying another word, he went next door to the church. He took a flashlight with him and climbed down into the church cellar. There, next to the furnace, hidden by scrap lumber, was an identical hole. A few minutes later he returned with his face aglow. “We have found something!” he said. “There’s a hole in the church basement just like this one.” He gave the boys all flashlights and told them to go down into the hole. Teenie’s father went back the church and climbed down into the hole in the church cellar. It didn’t take long. Within minutes he met the boys in the middle of an underground tunnel that ran between the church and the parsonage. Her father explained what it was. He said, “Our church was a stop on the Underground Railway—this church was helping slaves escape to freedom during the Civil War. “This is why God put us here,” their father said, “The hole in the cellar means we have a purpose, a heritage, and a reason for being.”

The Day of Pentecost is not about a hole in the cellar. It’s about a hole in heaven. God’s Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to earth. You might say, “Jesus opened up a hole to the heavenly realms. Jesus opened a portal—a passageway between heaven and earth.” Suddenly, on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God—came whooshing, like a great rushing wind, pouring through that hole. The Spirit of God fills the whole room where the disciples are staying. Tongues of fire appear on their heads. They begin to speak in different languages. Or do they? One of the parallels that you hear between the New Testament and the Old Testament is the parallel between Pentecost and the Tower of Babel. Do you remember the story of the Tower of Babel? Men tried to build a tower that would reach into heaven. To punish their pride, God confused their language. Human language was undone--fractured into a thousand different tongues and dialects. People couldn’t understand one another anymore. The story of Pentecost is just the opposite. Babel is undone—but not by the restoration of a

common language—(and not by the spiritual gift of speaking in a heavenly tongue mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament). On Pentecost all the visitors to Jerusalem from far and distant countries—they all continue to speak their own languages—but what do they hear? In amazement and astonishment the crowds ask, “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” Therefore, the miracle of Pentecost is not so much a miracle of speaking. It’s a miracle of hearing and listening. Do you remember the old brokerage commercial for E.F.Hutton?—“When E.F.Hutton talks, people listen!” The idea was that ordinarily when people talk no one really listens. Theodore Reik is an American psychologist who wrote a book called *Listening with the Third Ear*. He said that really hearing what other people have to say to us requires special effort. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, criticizes us for “listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other has to say ... an impatient, inattentive listening, that despises the (other) and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person.”

At Pentecost we celebrate God’s gift of the Holy Spirit who gives us a fresh capacity to listen. In the Spirit our ears are opened and the continuous din of our own needs does not make us deaf to the needs of others. In the Spirit our ears are opened and the loud certainty of our own convictions does not keep us from really hearing and considering the ideas and perspectives of others. In the Spirit our ears are opened and we are brought out of the locked-door mentality and natural self-centeredness of our own lives to encounter people who are different from us—just like those first disciples were driven from an upper room, where they were “holed up” behind locked doors. They were driven by the Spirit of God out into the streets of Jerusalem where they encountered visitors from all over the world. It sounds like the streets, here, where we live, doesn’t it. If your ears are open to listening, you and I have the opportunity to encounter people from

all over the world—to share with them the love of God, the message of salvation and the Gospel of Christ. And even invite them to church!

Did I mention that Leontine Kelly's father was, of course, a black pastor of a black Methodist church in downtown Cincinnati. But the old brick gothic building that they worshiped in had originally belonged to a white congregation. And it was these white German-Lutheran believers who welcomed the black runaway slaves into their church and helped them on their way to freedom. We have a purpose, my friends—to listen to the needs of the people in the world and to shine the light of God's love into those dark holes where people need to feel His love and know their Savior.

Martin Luther (not Martin Luther King—this is the real Martin Luther) knew the power of speaking and listening. Do you know what he called the church? Luther called the church the Mundhaus (the “Mouth House”). Luther believed that originally the Gospel was an oral communication. Only later was it written down. And what the preacher does is to take the written Word of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, restore it to its original oral form in the sermon. It's telling the story of Jesus in a new way. That's what they did on the first Pentecost—they told the story of Jesus in a new way. It's what you and I called to do—to reach across the barriers of race and ethnicity, of culture and language and shine the light of God's love into the dark places. We are called to tell our faith story—to open up the hole to heaven and let the Holy Spirit of God shine through!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give us ears to truly listen to the people around us. Give us opportunities to share our faith story. Let Your Holy Spirit work through our lives to shine the light of Christ into our dark world. Amen.