
Wait. Stop! What?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

Wait. Stop. What?

I look forward to the reading of the Gospel on Pentecost.

The Deacon starts off in the usual way, "The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John." But, after the congregational response, "Glory to you, Lord Christ," something unexpected happens. Voices sound out from all over the church. And, they're speaking in many different languages.

It's a great Sunday to bring a friend to church.

I like to look for folks who are visiting, or who forgot about how we read the Gospel on this day. They're the ones who get the full benefit of this practice. You can see them, each in their own way, saying, "Wait. Stop! What?"

You might think for a moment that you are surrounded by Pentecostal or charismatic Christians speaking in tongues. In several of his letters, Paul tells of believers speaking to God in words that can't always be understood by other people. (I Cor. 14:2) It's called "glossolalia."

But, as you listen, you begin to recognize the languages being spoken: Spanish, French, German, Russian, and Greek. Canon Marsh said that he would do "East Tennessee" this year. You might listen for him in particular!

The difference, of course, is that these languages are not addressed to God. They are addressed to other people. They are carrying a message for all of us.

As the story is told in the second chapter of Acts, devout Jews had gathered in Jerusalem for their festival of Pentecost. They had come from many different places and spoke many different languages. It was fifty days after Passover and they were celebrating both the bringing in of the spring harvest and the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

That's when the followers of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, burst onto the scene and began to speak in tongues that all could understand. "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" people asked in amazement. "And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2: 7, 8)

How is it, in other words, that these particular people can offer a common message to everyone, despite such distinctive differences of place and language? It's as if all of the divisions caused by the destruction of the Tower of Babel had been

overcome” or, more precisely, forgiven. (Gen. 11:1-9)

This is the new beginning that we are celebrating in our festival of Pentecost. Fifty days after Easter, we gather to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit with its power to unite us, to make us one.

The Holy Spirit is a funny thing, though. Even when you know it's coming, it can surprise you. It can come like the rushing wind, or tongues of fire, or a still small voice.

But, however it comes, it often leaves you saying to yourself, "Wait. Stop! What?"

Canon George Maxwell
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