

“The Church as a School of Love: Inclusive Love”  
Acts 2:1-12

We will begin with a video clip from the animated movie, The Incredibles 2. The Incredibles are a family with supernatural powers which they had used in the past to help others. But because of public opinion, they had to let go of fighting the bad guys. This scene is about how they could change the public perception:  
<https://youtu.be/JZskKvnQfFU>.

Two issues that often get in the way of our ability to love our neighbors: Perception and communication. How we perceive reality decides everything that we know and believe to be true. The problem is that the lens we use is so close to us that it is invisible. Our culture, our experiences, our stories, our ways of seeing reality, and many other factors shape and influence our perception of reality. Thus, our communication with one another is also impacted by how we see things.

When it comes to loving our neighbors, ourselves, God, and all of creation, we have an opportunity to help each other to keep our hearts, minds, and souls open to new perceptions instead of being stuck in our small and incomplete ways and worldviews. This comes from the power of the Spirit rushing into our lives and blowing out all the old cobwebs of separation, hate, or indifference. The Spirit always moves us toward a greater wholeness.

In the story for today which is Pentecost, we hear about the experience of the disciples of the Holy Spirit coming so that they end up connecting with others across barriers of language and perception to feel the unity of the human and divine life.

The path forward for the disciples of Jesus was unclear. Even though Jesus had asked them to continue his mission, they were hesitant because of the pressures of the world around them. There was great fear of persecution. They also had their tradition of not reaching out to others. The Jewish faith was not a missionary faith. It was very tribal and local. The Jewish people did not think of going to other nations to spread their religion. And so the prospects of the mission of Jesus were very limited. The powers of the empire seemed to have won. The disciples waited in Jerusalem after their leader had gone from them. It seemed that the powers of the world had won over the power of God's goodness as they saw it in Jesus Christ. The only way to get out of the cycle of fear and retreat was to receive the power of the Holy Spirit in a special way. Let's watch a video about Acts 2 from the Bible Project: <https://youtu.be/JQhkWmFJKnA>.

The believers were gathered in Jerusalem for one of their usual religious festivals in a world that was heavily divided by culture, ethnicity, class, gender, language, and religion. They were hiding in an upper room because of their fear. But all the boundaries that had divided people from one another were broken down and they were able to communicate with one another without any barriers. They were the same people as they were before. It was the same world they lived in, but everything was different from that moment on because their whole vision of life and faith was transformed. They knew that despite all the pain and brokenness of their world, there was a greater power for healing and justice at work in their lives. They experienced love that brought back all the broken pieces.

What is interesting about the power of the Holy Spirit is that the disciples were able to see the world from a totally different point of view. All the usual barriers that normally would have separated them from the others were broken down. For the first time, they were able to see others as their kin. Language and cultural barriers were gone. Their fears vanished and their focus shifted to love.

Communication across barriers became the hallmark of that day. This was the Spirit the disciples needed to move out of a small and tribal worldview to embrace the unity of humanity. It is interesting that this experience of being able to speak different languages was temporary, but its impact was permanent. Instead of going back to their small and tribal life, the disciples end up traveling all over the world to spread the good news of Jesus and to help people learn his way of love. They did not need to speak the different languages of the people they reached. All that they needed was love and the commitment to seeking the kingdom of God everywhere.

In the same spirit of love that heals and transforms barriers, we are invited to let the Spirit move us from our small worlds of safety and similarity of opinion, race, culture, and politics to embrace the expansiveness of God's love and perspective.

Brian McLaren offers this challenge: Take the pledge to the Six Commitments of Common Good Communication. Here it is:

"We expressed these commitments in terms of values because we believe we will only learn to communicate deeply and honestly if we speak from the heart, not just the head, from level of values, not just opinions or arguments.

#### **THE SIX COMMITMENTS OF COMMON GOOD COMMUNICATION**

*I am committed to the six values of Common Good Communication:*

*EXAMPLE  
CURIOSITY  
CLARITY  
DECENCY  
FAIRNESS  
PERSISTENCE.*

1. **EXAMPLE:** I will demonstrate integrity and lead by example in my communication, in public and in private. When I fall short, I'll admit it, apologize, and reaffirm my commitment to lead by example.
2. **CURIOSITY:** I will show uncommon curiosity by asking honest questions, staying open to new information, seeking to understand others as I would want to be understood, and listening with empathy.
3. **CLARITY:** I won't hold back, speak half-truths, be intentionally vague, or attempt to deceive. I will self-report my feelings and my underlying values whenever possible.
4. **DECENCY:** I will strive to show genuine courtesy toward everyone, especially when we disagree. I will not mock, call names, or dehumanize any person or group. I will establish and uphold ground rules for respectful conversation whenever possible.
5. **FAIRNESS:** I will practice basic fairness in these five ways:
  - I won't compare my side's best with the other side's worst.
  - I will not assume the worst motives in my opponents.
  - I will acknowledge the upsides and downsides of all positions.
  - I will praise my counterparts when they deserve it, and challenge my allies when they deserve it.

– I will notice who isn't at the table, and I will do my part to be sure they are included and heard.

**6. PERSISTENCE:** I expect this work to be hard and I know we will make mistakes. I will stay in the room with difference, be resilient after failure, never giving up and always seeking the common good.”

A foundational commitment that the Spirit of God invites us to make is to that of deep communion with the Spirit of God where all the differences and fears of life are healed and transformed into a greater whole.

We will end with a piece from Ann Weems about the power of the Holy Spirit as it moves in the life of a community of faith to make the church a school of love. I will need a few volunteers to act out the words of this vision of the church as a community that celebrates love. Your part will be to be the naysayers.

Narrator: There was once a church that had only party rooms: the Leadership Party Room, the Music Party Room, the Feasting Party Room, the Do Justice Party Room, the Love Mercy Party Room, the Touch Lepers Party Room. In the center of the building a large round room with a communion table: God's Party Room.

There was in the church an air of festivity and brightness that could not be denied. The people outside the church pointed their fingers and shook their heads.

People: “Something should be done about that church.”

Narrator: They were especially upset when they saw that the members wore party hats and smiles both inside and outside the church. Other congregations came to take a look and were shocked when they saw this church having so much fun during a worship service, snapping their fingers and dancing. They screamed,

People: “Sacrilegious.”

Narrator: But the people in the church just smiled at them and went right on doing things like taking people in wheelchairs to the park and playing ball with them. When everybody else was collecting canned goods for the poor, this church bought pizza and marched right into dingy, dirty, paint-peeling apartments and sat down to eat with the tenants. They held picnics for the nursing home. It was at one of these picnics that some of the members climbed up on the roof and shouted.

One: “Good News!”

Narrator: But one of the outsiders said,

People: “Now we can get them for disturbing the peace.”

Narrator: The police arrived with sirens, ready for the arrest, but came out two hours later wearing party hats and smiles. One Sunday afternoon, the entire congregation met at the jail and passed out flowers to the prisoners. The following week after bread and wine and much laughter at the Lord's Table, the people went to the hospital and asked to see the dying patients. They held their hands and mopped their brows and spoke to them of life. The crowd shouted,

People: “Disgraceful! They must be stopped.”

Narrator: So the crowd appealed to the governing body of the denomination, and this committee of respected church people went to see for themselves. The committee asked the church,

People: "Do you deny the charges of heresy? Do you deny that you've mocked the church and the Lord?"

Narrator: The people of the church looked into the stern red faces and smiled at them. They held out their hands to the committee and led them to the Birthday Cake Party Room. There on a table sat a large cake decorated beautifully in doves descending and red flames and words that read: Happy Birthday, Church! The people began cutting cake and blowing up balloons and handing out party hats to the committee members. The chairperson cried,

People: "Wait! Wait! Can't you take anything seriously?"

One: "We take our commitment to God very seriously indeed."

People: "You don't take it seriously at all! You have parties and wear silly hats and blow up balloons and sing and dance and have fun. Do you call that commitment?"

Narrator: The people smiled at the chairperson and asked him if he'd like a glass of wine. The chairperson hit his fist on the table and said:

People: "I don't want wine, and I don't want birthday cake. We're here to reprimand you. We're here to show you that you are wrong. Can't you be serious?"

One: "We are! We are asking you take communion with us."

People (almost screaming): "With birthday cake? Outrageous!"

One: "Outrageous? We ask you to sit at our table and sup with us. God gave the Holy Spirit to believers, and that is something to celebrate! It's an occasion for a party. We are celebrants of the gift of Life. We are community. We are God's church. Why are your faces red when we are trying to do justice and love mercy? Why do you shake your fists at us when we are trying to discover the hurting and begin the healing? We are overjoyed that we can be the church, a community of people, who are many, yet one – who are different, but who walk together and welcome any who would walk with us. When we weep there is someone to weep with us and to affirm us and to take us to a party. When we see injustices, we must be about God's business of freeing the oppressed. When we are faithless, we have God's promise for forgiveness. Isn't it remarkable that we can be God's good news? Is it any wonder we have a church full of party rooms? There is so much love to celebrate!"

Narrator: The committee stared at the people, and the people moved closer to them and put their arms around them. The committee chairperson stepped up to the table and sliced a piece of birthday cake, took a bite, and laughed out loud. He began slicing and passing it out. When the wine was poured and the hands were held, the chairperson raised his glass and said,

People: "There is so much Love to celebrate! Happy Birthday, Church!" Amen.