

SERMON: "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SHOW GOD'S LOVE?"
TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT DEUTERONOMY 10:12-22
NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 2:1-21

May 19, 2024 - Day of Pentecost
Church-wide Confirmation Series – Lesson Seven

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

Working on a sermon means doing some research, studying the biblical text (its place in the particular book and in the bible, commentaries, historical context) It also includes study of our own context, what is shaping our worldview More reading. I've read some very insightful books this year including Sheriff Thompson's book [Anyplace But Here – The Uncomfortable Convergence Between Mental Illness and the Criminal Justice System](#)

While doing that reading and research I usually listen to music in the background My YouTube feed is varied but most of it is rock n roll and old school R & B. So here is some of my research. Do you know the song, "Ain't No Sunshine" by Bill Withers? I've asked Hugh to give us a taste

There is a bit of a repeat in the song. He says "I know" a lot. He says it 26 times straight. I know. I counted. I did my research. I'm mentioning that repetition because I want to you to see the connection between knowing and showing – knowing as a way of showing God's love, both in the biblical text from Acts, the story of Pentecost, and in our context

We continue our Churchwide Confirmation series with the question, "What does it mean to show God's love?" It is really a question of how ... How might we show God's love. My suggestion this morning is that knowing can be both an impediment to showing God's love and it can be an instrument, a good way to show God's love

It is an impediment when we think we 'know it all,' when we've got it all figured out When whatever research and reading we do is done to reinforce our own bias When we, in our own way, say over and over again "I know, I know, I know ..."

It is an instrument, and a most effective one at that, when we get to know someone else, listen to them, learn about them and learn from them find ways to connect and communicate. That is what happened at Pentecost By the power of the Spirit, they knew how to communicate, how to connect

NOT SPEAKING 'IN TONGUES'

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

They began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

This was not some spiritual super language they were speaking, speaking in tongues
What good would that do? An insider language for insiders?

No, the disciples were given the ability to be understood (and I believe understand) others
That is spelled out in detail later in verses few lay readers really want to read
too many places and peoples to pronounce

**And how is it that we hear, each of us in his or her own language?
Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia,
Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphyla,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from
Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear
them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.**

All these different people, from all sorts of places heard in their own tongues!

They didn't hear people speaking in some gibberish we call tongues

They heard in their own tongues, complete with l'accent aigu for the French

You see the difference in types of knowing here – between being sure we already know
and being intentional in trying to get to know someone else. It is critical we do.

Seeing the difference will help us fit together knowing and showing, showing God's love

Knowing and speaking an insider language does NOT help us show God's love

Paul's letters, esp. 1 Corinthians tackle that problem – how those who spoke
in tongues were acting like spiritual elites.

We struggle with the same thing in our own ways in our day and time

Especially with shifts in our secular society with fewer people, esp. young people
active in faith communities. Worry about how times are changing has led

too many people of faith to put their efforts in trying to go back
or trying to impose our laws and language on others

Those efforts not only won't bring people back to church,

in many ways those efforts are pushing people away

THIS MISSION FIELD

The story of Pentecost is the story of the disciples speaking other languages
Given the rapidly changing reality of our time and place, I think there is
a lesson here for us. Maybe we need to learn some languages
learn how to better speak to and with our secular context,
learn to speak the language like the missionaries of old did.

I remember hearing what I think is a great illustration from Joan Gray,
who was serving at that time as the moderator of our denomination
She described how she understood mission work, how she grew up,
thinking of mission as something that happened over there, overseas

She likened that work to a water hose. Turn the handle and let the water flow
all the way from here to there. Heads nodded in agreement hearing this.
Then she told us about a better way to water, and a better way to think about mission,
Mission is more of a soaker hose. The water doesn't have to travel great lengths.
It spills out all over ... including in our own backyards.

When it comes to thinking about how to show God's love,
I think we can learn a whole lot from the old school missionaries we supported
and shipped all over the world AND apply that to the mission field that is
our own community, our own backyard.

Two things the missionaries worked on – two things about knowing
They focused on what they knew, the basics of the gospel
And they focused on who they would be getting to know
They learned the language and the customs of the people and places

I am convinced the best way for us to show God's love is to do these two things
One. Focus on the basics of what we know and believe about God, about Jesus
And two. Focus on listening to and learning from our communities

Let's go over each of those briefly.
Going back to our Old Testament lesson I hope you remember the heading
"The Essence of the Law." Here Moses is telling them how to stick to the basics
how to show God's love. He does so with multiple references to what God
has done for them, references to God's love for them

He gives them concrete examples. He tells them to love the stranger
What Moses does not do is get into the weeds, the fine print of the law
He majors in the majors. He does not sweat the small stuff. Good advice.

GROWING OUR WORLDS

Given Moses summary of the law, fresh with tablets in hand,
his 'essence of the law' ... I have to ask. What would that look like for us?
What might be your essence of the gospel – the basics of your belief?

Surely like Moses it would include first and foremost a proclamation of God's love
(Think John 3:16). And it would include some examples of what God commands
Same example about loving the stranger certainly works. Think Jesus
great commandments to love God and neighbor, the Good Samaritan

If we want to show God's love, let's show the world those basics!
We don't show God's love by pointing fingers, by starting arguments,
by debating doctrine and details, by acting like we know better,
by acting like we are better. We do so by pointing to God's love
and mercy shown to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Wonder what the Church in our day and time would look like to the outside world
if that was the consistent message they heard over and over and over
like say a repeat in a popular song? You know?

Speaking of that repetition, on to the second thinking about making the effort
to get to know and understand our neighbors, both near and far.

I hope you're picking up on a consistent thread running throughout our ministry together
We prayed for the world, one nation at a time, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe.
That took five years. And this year, we're praying for these United States
one state a week, including America's native peoples and our territories

We're not doing this just because I am a geography nerd
It is an intentional exercise to help expand our respective worldviews
to stretch our minds and our hearts. It is an effort to get to know our neighbors
our neighbors all over this big, beautiful world that God so loves

We're doing so because this pastor has learned and keeps learning
that we cannot love our neighbors as we are commanded by Christ to do
if we don't bother to make the effort to get to know them

There are far too many voices that want you to be afraid of that changing world,
afraid of those neighbors, afraid of the other. Voices that make you feel threatened
by a world full of Parthians and Medes and Elamites.

Jesus' voice is not one of those voices.

SUMMARY

Instead of filling us with fear, the Holy Spirit sends us out into the world
to get to know some Parthians and Medes and Elamites

Now let me go full circle and wrap this up about knowing and showing
Which do you think might be best? A better way to show God's love?

You can repeat 26 times over what you know,
how right you are about this and that and that too. I know. I know. I know.

Or you can see if you might think of 26 people, 26 different people,
you've made the effort to get to know including some ...

Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia,
Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphyla,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors
From Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians

And the list goes on and on and on.
Or at least it should!