

# MHA Sunday



## One Sunday, one service, one church

### Sermon on Acts 2:1-21

The city of Jerusalem, like cities today, attracted diverse crowds of people; people seeking pleasure, spectacle, employment, education, well-being, safety and stability.

Modern day transportation and communication mean that many of us who would have taken our holidays somewhere in the UK, now (sun-seekers and skiers alike) go to places all over the world for a holiday. Our families are spread out over the globe and over the next few months, many of us will brave the queues at the airports just to get away for a couple of weeks. So you will probably know how it feels when you're in a country where English isn't the first language, and you suddenly understand what is being said because English is being spoken.

Someone 'like me' is here. Someone I can talk to. Someone understands me.

*I was in Morocco a few years ago and made the train journey from Ouarzazate (down in the south) back to Tangier. I speak neither French nor Arabic and the train was delayed. Although I wasn't unduly worried it was a long journey and beyond smiles and gestures no-one was able to communicate with me. It was a relief to get off the train and have someone know my name and greet me in English! Right there and then, I felt a sense of home-coming. I knew that I had been 'found'. I knew that I belonged. I was safe.*

Language is important.

The passage from Acts tells us that there were people from 'every nation under heaven' living in Jerusalem, and specifically mentions countries around the Mediterranean – Rome, Crete, Turkey, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Syria. And each heard their own language being spoken.

But spoken language wasn't all that was going on. The disciples were behaving as though they were drunk and the crowd was drawn by their behaviour before hearing what they had to say.

The way we behave, the way we act, speaks volumes too. And Christ's disciples have much to learn about that today. We cannot simply speak, we must also live. There has to be authenticity. Our words and our lives must communicate the gospel.

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The passage from Acts talks about the disciples 'speaking in tongues' and it's easy for us to get hung up on those few words. But if we think this is a passage about just one of the many charismatic gifts listed in the New Testament (NT) then we are missing a more significant and fundamental point, that the people understood what the disciples were saying. The large, diverse crowd understood what they were saying '*each in their own language*'.

This was God saying – 'This message isn't just for you, it's for the whole world. Get out there – speak it, act it, live it...!' As Paul says in his letter to the church in Corinth:

*'If I speak in the language of humans or angels*

*but have not love*

*I am but a clanging gong and a sounding symbol.'*

There are various lists of gifts of the Spirit to be found in the NT – and skills such as wisdom, prophecy, administration, helps are all to be found there... Then there is the fruit of the Spirit love, joy, peace, long-suffering and so on...

Take a look at them and you'll find that God's Spirit is as diverse as humanity and more so.

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The small group of disciples, who a few weeks before had run away because they were terrified, and since then had been meeting mainly behind closed doors because they were afraid, were now out in a public place acting like idiots and speaking in a language which no-one knew but everyone understood.

And that's because there's another kind of communication that goes on which involves listening rather than speaking.

Jesus talked about OUR responsibility to listen and to live out our faith in the world.

*“When the Advocate comes,  
whom I will send to you from the Father,  
the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father,  
he will testify on my behalf.  
You also are to testify  
because you have been with me from the beginning.”*

God speaks to us in a language we understand. It is OUR individual language that God speaks in. God doesn't ask us to be what we're not, but to be what we are, and to be that as envoys in this world of great need.

Peter was a natural leader and speaker. We see that throughout the pages of scripture, and with the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter saw those gifts escalate to a whole new level.

What are your gifts? What are mine? Are they available for God to use?

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The message from the Day of Pentecost is – don't stay behind your closed doors because of fear, but use the gifts and skills you've been given to live and work to God's praise and glory.

Yes, come in here – to confess, know God's forgiveness and healing power, receive the sacrament, but then go out, go out, go out....live and work...

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We recognise the darkness inside ourselves and the disordered nature of our own spirits as we pray for ourselves and for the peoples, cities and nations of our world using the words of the ancient hymn:

*Expand thy wings celestial dove  
Brood o'er our nature's night  
On OUR disordered spirits move  
And let there now be light.*