The Tongue Given to Us

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

Ezek. 37: 1-14 Romans 8: 22-27 John 15: 26 & 27; 16: 4(b) -25

Psalm 104: 24-35

**Summary: We, who are given a prayer tongue and a language with which to speak the mighty works of God, know this: the name of that tongue in any language is love.**

Pentecost Sunday has always been special for me. Alone of the three major church holidays, Pentecost has largely escaped commercialization. We don’t hand out candy or presents on this day, no overeating, and there are no magic elves or bunnies anywhere to be seen! The original Pentecost was the day when worship inside an upper room spilled over into public witness! In a very literal sense, the whole congregation emerged as professing Christians. Let me tell you, there are worlds of difference between a “professing Christian” and a “professional Christian.” If “love came down at Christmas,” it “came out” at Pentecost.

Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones reminds me of Pentecost and it also resonates with my life. Like the dry bones, like captive, hopeless Israel, I was unable to move until God moved me. It is probably hard for any of you who know me now to imagine me being quiet or tongue-tied in devotions. In fact, my brothers Jim and Don, and many others, have remarked that I have “a gift for prayer.” That is literally true.

When I was a young adult, I volunteered as a camp counselor in the Maine UCC church camp on Lake Cobbseconte, Pilgrim lodge. Each week, there were different campers, boy and girls matched to an age group like 5&6th graders, 7th and 8th, teens, and so on. Each week had different themes, different directors, and – mostly – different counselors. Usually the only ones who stayed over week to week were support staff like kitchen workers, lifeguards, grounds management, and the like. I was an exception. I had volunteered for several consecutive sessions. At the end of each week, I had about 24 hours free before the next group came in.

A session devoted to Prayer had just ended, and I was struggling with a feeling of failure. I wanted to pray and have a closer relationship with God, but my feelings were all bunched up without words to express them. So, that scripture from Romans stood out: “The Holy Spirit can make sense of feelings that just sound like meaningless noise to others and even to myself, and that sense will go right to God’s ears.” Well, I reminded God of that, which was already a prayer, had I but noticed, and I asked God to understand while I put my emotions into sounds.

I wandered alone on the nature trails and sang gibberish songs. It worked! I did feel closer to God and calmer, like I’d had a good cry. So, the next day, I had a few more hours after breakfast before the new group started arriving. So, again not really believing it was a prayer, I reminded God about those languages given to the disciples on Pentecost. “I can give you my feelings, but I’d like to know what I’m talking about. Can I have a prayer tongue and make it English?” I could. God answered that prayer, and I haven’t shut up since!

I’ve heard other people, right here, pray like this. Danny and Lynn Geraditas come right to mind! I’ve tasted prayer when Linda made Ruthie’s pineapple cake for her memorial luncheon. That was a two for one: a collaborative prayer! I’ve seen these prayers in Linda’s flower arrangements, and Mike and a few other handy people have built and repaired a few prayers, which the Holy Spirit also brings to God’s ears. I hear these prayers when we sing our hymns, even if we may go a bit astray.

This is, in fact, a very Pentecostal church despite our denominational affiliation. We have a prayer tongue given us by God, and the name of the tongue is “love.” Love is the very language of Heaven. Let’s speak it every day!