

[Mummy?] When I was in 6th grade, I had a huge crush on Becky Yoder. We were friends (but she was not interested in me - I know, I know... tragic!). We worked together on a book report in our Language Arts class, and we decided to do a book on mummification in Ancient Egypt. We were totally captivated by the process, which seemed so strange and foreign to two 12-year-olds growing up in the Midwest.

For our report, we simulated a mummification. In the process, several vital organs are removed and put into elaborate jars. So we gathered various foods to stand in for the body parts removed during mummification, and for the liver (or maybe the stomach), I used a chicken breast. Because I am a huge nerd, and was trying to impress the love of my elementary school life, I had swiped a chicken breast a couple of weeks earlier and put it in a tupperware. The morning of the presentation, I brought it to school along with the other ingredients for the process. In front of our whole 6th-grade class, Becky laid on a table, ready to be mummified. As she explained the process, I faked removing her various vital organs. When we got to the liver, I opened the chicken container, only to be assaulted by the unmistakable smell of rotten meat - apparently the chicken had gone *very* bad. I was thrown off, and both Becky *and* my teacher gagged while the rest of the class either giggled or retched.

I sealed the chicken back up, we finished our presentation and I went to wash the stench of rot off my hands. Becky and I got an A+++ on the presentation. We never did date, but I *did* spend the next few years mildly obsessed with Ancient Egypt.

Obviously, I didn't grow up to be an Egyptologist (despite how awesome it looked in StarGate). But I've never forgotten the surprise, shame and revulsion I felt when I cracked open that Tupperware to find a rotting piece of chicken.

[God-Talk] Maybe you've had this experience with religion at some point in your life. You were turned off by the church. Or maybe every time you hear Evangelicals quoted in the media concerning some social change, you feel like that tupperware of rotten chicken has been cracked open again, and you start gagging a little.

[God Talk vs. building "Conversations today"] In the last 50 years, the world has changed dramatically, and the pace of the change is only accelerating. Conversations about race and sexuality have changed dramatically, particularly in the last couple of decades, to the point that many today wonder if religion has anything helpful to say at all about either issue.

As science advances, new discoveries call into question long-held religious beliefs about everything from the age of the universe to the nature of consciousness and the existence of the soul.

Technological advances have created a world almost unimaginable even a generation ago. We have more access to more people, and almost limitless information. With Facebook,

Snapchat and Tindr feeding the new hook-up culture, parents are unsure how to navigate what's good for their kids. Technology has made us more productive than ever before, but we still don't have enough time for our families. We're more connected *and* more alone than any point in history. How do we keep *up* with ever-changing, technology, let alone ask how a 2,000-year-old religion can offer anything meaningful to the conversation?

And globalization has brought us into contact with dozens of world religions. Long gone are the days when American culture was predominantly Christian. Our world today is a smörgåsbord of beliefs, practices and values.

Under the weight of all these new languages, new ways of talking about the world, we might be forgiven for wondering if God has a place at all. If maybe it's best to leave the tupperware closed and just pitch it altogether.

Today is Pentecost - it's a holiday in the Church that celebrates when the Church received the Holy Spirit. It's sort of like a birthday and 4th of July all wrapped up in one. And what we celebrate on this day is that God is not out of touch or irrelevant. Pentecost is the good news that God is ahead of us, has always been ahead of us. That God is actually calling us forward, to step into all those scary conversations, to embrace the messiness of our world and of a faith that is still able to transform that world.

If we do, we will find that God is already there, working, and is as fresh, relevant and helpful as we'd dared imagine. We'll find that God cares a great deal about race and sexuality issues. That God isn't afraid of science, but celebrates scientific discovery and achievement. That God's vision for humanity can help us navigate new technologies. That the good news about Jesus' resurrection is good news for all peoples, in all faiths.

Pentecost is the good news that God is ahead of us, inviting us to step forward, to join in.

[Two sides who can't communicate, maybe a "?" between them?] I know that sounds nearly incomprehensible to a lot of us. Some of us are fluent in the language of faith (or church-language). Some call this Christianese. We can talk to non-church people about their lack of sanctification and their problematic eschatology. Some of us have PhD's in Christianese, but are unable to converse in the everyday language being spoken by our culture.

Others of us understand these new conversations very well, but when it comes to the language of faith, we can't make heads or tails of any of the God-talk.

What we all secretly wish for is some sort of Rosetta Stone.

Before Rosetta Stone was a super-expensive language software, it was one of the most important archaeological discoveries in the modern era. [Hieroglyphics Stone] Ancient

Egyptians wrote using an alphabet we call hieroglyphics. It was complicated enough that archaeologists couldn't translate it - no one could make heads or tails of it.

[**Rosetta Stone**] Until 1799, when a French soldier discovered the so-called Rosetta Stone. In and of itself, the Rosetta Stone is relatively ordinary - it's an inscription from Ptolemy V, an Egyptian king who ruled about 200 years before Jesus. The archaeological world has no shortage of inscriptions from ancient kings - and many of them were much more influential than Ptolemy V.

What makes the Rosetta Stone so special is that the inscription was written in three languages - ancient Greek, the language of the Ptolemaic Empire, Demotic - the language of Egypt in Ptolemy V's day, and in hieroglyphics, the royal Egyptian script.

Language experts were able to use the ancient Greek, which they knew well, to translate the hieroglyphics, and unlock the key to translating ancient Egyptian writings once and for all.

The Rosetta Stone was the bridge between the languages of the past and the future.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could find a similar bridge between the language of faith and the conversations that matter so much to us today? If we could find that key that unlocks the ancient faith of the Church for the post-modern world we live in?

[**DOVE/Flame superimposed over Rosetta Stone**] The good news (the surprising news) is that we have that key - the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised would come to us after he ascended to the throne of Heaven. The Spirit is God who lives within and among us, God who has gone out into the world, who is working even now to restore the world and heal all peoples everywhere.

The Spirit enables the Church to speak in a language the world understands, and the Spirit enables the world to hear the good news about Jesus resurrection such that they can join in what God is doing.

That's a big claim, I know. Especially since the Church often seems afraid of the world we live in. People outside the Church don't have any trouble understanding us - they hear our judgment and condemnation just fine.

[**scared Face**] As it so often is, the Church's anger is a veil for our fear. We're afraid of the changing world we live in, afraid we are in fact as out-of-touch and irrelevant as those hieroglyphics. We don't know what to do next, so we keep doing the same things we've always done, just louder.

We're afraid, and in our fear, we are not unlike Jesus' disciples in those days immediately following Good Friday. They too were afraid, hiding from the dominant culture. But then Jesus appeared bodily to them, to assure them he had in fact been raised from the dead.

Over the next few weeks, everything began to change for them. Emboldened by Jesus' resurrection, by the proof that Rome couldn't have the final word, by the evidence that Jerusalem's religious elite had it all wrong, the disciples gathered momentum. Their fear transformed to courage.

And then, as we saw last week, Jesus left. His resurrection had proven he was the one true king not of Israel, but of the whole world, the whole universe. And so, after a few weeks, he ascended to his throne.

Before he left, he charged his followers with a mission:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." -- Acts 1:8

Jesus sent them on an impossible mission: to bear witness to the good news of his resurrection, of the new reality his new life had initiated, to the whole world.

[scared Face] Put yourselves in their shoes. They had been afraid *before* the resurrection, but then everything was okay. THEN Jesus left just as they were beginning to get their heads around the new reality AND he gave them an impossible mission.

But Jesus hadn't sent them alone. Rather, he promised the Holy Spirit would give them power. So - as we saw last week - they waited together.

They didn't wait because they were afraid. Yes, the task before them seemed impossible. They were a small gathering of relatively uneducated guys who'd never traveled more than 150 miles from home. And they were supposed to take the good news about Jesus to the whole world?

How are they supposed to convince their fellow Jewish people that this guy who was crucified is actually their promised Messiah, God's chosen king, sent to save them?

And even if they could pull *that* off, how in the world are they supposed to translate that message to the Romans, the guys who *killed* Jesus? How are they supposed to be able to explain concepts like Torah and Messiah to a culture that rules the world, that cares nothing for this backwater country and their little tribal god?

It seems like an impossible gulf to cross. An impenetrable language barrier. Who could blame them for feeling scared, a little hopeless, in that week after Jesus left? But they didn't wait because they were afraid.

They waited because they knew this new world that God was creating, that God had begun to create on that first Easter, was one that could only come about through God's Spirit.

Which brings us to Pentecost. Turn with me to Acts 2. This story follows immediately after Jesus' ascension. Last week we saw that Jesus had told them to Go and Wait, so here they were, having gone, and waiting. They were gathered on Pentecost, a holiday that celebrated when God had made a covenant with Israel - it was sort of a national wedding anniversary.

Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit, that they would receive the power to carry out his mission. They were waiting for his promise to come true. So let's read what happened on that first Pentecost, beginning in verse 1:

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. -- Acts 2:1-12

The disciples were gathered in Jerusalem. Waiting for the Spirit to come as Jesus had promised. Waiting for the power, the ability, to fulfill Jesus' mission - to take his good news to the whole world.

And on this holy day, Pentecost, the celebration of the birth of Israel, Jerusalem was filled with thousands of pilgrims, Jewish travelers from all over the world who had come to celebrate in the capital.

The Spirit comes, as Jesus had promised, and something amazing happens: the Spirit enables the Church to speak and the world around them to hear, all in language they all can understand.

[Group of people image from shelley's sermon] Those first followers begin to announce the good news about Jesus to *everyone*, and many hear and respond - Acts tells us some 3,000 new believers were added that day.

Those believers will shortly return to their homes. All over the world. And take with them the good news about Jesus.

In their wildest dreams, could those first Christians, huddled together in that upper room, waiting and praying for the Spirit to come, have imagined God would fulfill Jesus' command to them so boldly, so immediately?

It's no wonder, as we see in the following chapters of Acts, that the Church so boldly takes the message of Jesus' new life to everyone - *everyone*. Again and again, as the first Christians followed the Spirit into the world, they re-lived that first Pentecost.

[Image-review of series?] Today is the culmination of a series we began on Easter Sunday, and what we've seen every week is that when the Spirit came upon those first Christians, they were compelled to go beyond the bounds of who they thought was allowed in. First it was the poor. Then the rebels - the very people who persecuted them and who had killed Jesus. Then it was all those whose bodies didn't fit in - the lame, the women, those like the eunuchs who didn't fit into the right categories.

And then, Peter was called to visit a Gentile - the ultimate Them. When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he found the Spirit was already at work among them, and they too began to speak in tongues - just like Peter had at Pentecost.

[Dove behind peter and in front?] Peter realized that while the Spirit was pushing the Church to GO THERE, the Spirit had also already gone ahead of them, was working before them, to prepare the way for them. That by the time they got to all those places that had previously been off limits, the Spirit was already there, working and waiting for *them* to catch up. Again and again, the power of the Spirit enabled them to do more than they ever thought possible. Pentecost wasn't a one-time event. Pentecost was the beginning of a new reality that changed them - and us - forever.

So what of us today? God is not a stale, expired deity. The challenges of our changing world - from scientific and technological advances, to new conversations about race and sexuality, to the challenge of a pluralistic world - these are not surprising to God. In fact, God is already working in all these places, to announce the good news of the new life Jesus offers.

That the Church is unprepared for these conversations does not mean *God* is unprepared. Rather, it means Catalyst is in the same position as the first Church. We too, on this Pentecost, shall wait on the Spirit. We will be a church who is unafraid to engage in these conversations. We will learn what the Spirit has to say about race and sexuality. We will not be afraid of science. We will continue to seek what it means to be fully human in an ever-shifting technological world. And we will engage those of other faiths with grace, love and truth.

Though we feel ill-equipped for much of this, we know we are not on our own mission. We are on God's mission. The Spirit has gone before us and compels us to follow. So follow we will. We will act despite our fear, confident that God keeps every promise, that even now the Spirit is bringing life from death. We will wait for the Spirit to act, and we will react, as the Church has always done.

Catalyst has been and continues to be a Church committed to showing the world by our lives what the new life Jesus has given us and offers to everyone. We will continue to announce that good news in a language our world can understand. This is what the Spirit has done since the beginning, and we continue to follow the Spirit.

God is a breath of fresh air to a dying world, and we're inviting everyone to take a deep breath.

Communion Set-Up

We close today by coming to the Communion table. This meal reminds us that Jesus is the Word of God. When Jesus became human, God was translated from the heavenly realm beyond our comprehension into the understandable language of flesh and blood. So too, he gave us this meal, these elements of bread and wine as simple explanations, simple language, easily understood.

This is the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he died. He told them the bread was his body, broken for them. The wine was his blood, poured out to restore the relationship between God and humanity. Bread and wine. Food and drink.

When we partake we bear witness to this profound, simple, fully-translated reality that God became a human in order to speak our language directly to us. When we leave and bear witness to others, we are not asking them to learn a new, heavenly language. We are inviting them to recognize the true source of life, as simple and as necessary as bread, as understandable as drink.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive this meal. If you are willing to receive God's Spirit, the same Spirit that raised JEsus from the dead, the same Spirit that empowered those first followers, and if you're willing to follow that Spirit wherever she leads, then you're welcomed to come to the table.