

**The Gay Sermon**  
**Pentecost Sunday**  
**May 29, 2009**  
**Acts 2:1-21**

I visited my general practitioner (Dr. Walter Chi) this past week for an evaluation and blood work. I've been going to Dr. Chi since I moved here. His office is in Columbia, actually Elkridge, but his practice has a very Columbia-ish, multiracial, international sensibility. There are people from all over who work there; there are people from all over who are patients there. This week was no exception. A delightful, octogenarian (or close to it) couple entertained me while I waited. Normally I don't want to overhear anything said in a doctor's office, but this couple must've been together for fifty years yet they were totally interested in what each other had to say. They also did that idiosyncratic thing where they switched between their native language and English, sometimes in the same sentence. All in all they reminded me of the German couple in *Casablanca* whose "practiced their English" in Rick's bar before they came to America. Remember that scene? Carl, the server, came to sit with them and they toast America. Then they practice their English:

**Mr. Leuchtag: Liebchen - sweetnessheart, what watch?**

**Mrs. Leuchtag: Ten watch.**

**Mr. Leuchtag: Such much?**

**Carl: Hm. You will get along beautiful in America, mm-hmm.**

This is what I recorded in my journal about this lovely couple. "The older couple near me remind me of the [German] couple in Rick's bar who are practicing their English. They keep switching between their German language and English and combining the two. Very animated, very convivial. Still have a lot to say to each other. It's a Pentecost thing... I wish I could understand."

It's a Pentecost thing... I wish I could understand.

One of the major miracles of Pentecost is the ability to understand. Every single person from every single nationality spoke in his or her own language, but God in the form of the Holy Spirit provided the understanding in both the hearing and the responsive speech. It's a very impressive miracle. We celebrate this day in part because of this gift of understanding, of this gift of hearing as well as a gift in speaking. We celebrate this day, not just because the miracle was impressive (although it was); we celebrate this day because it was a day of all days when unity broke out.

Someone asked me a really important question this past week. This person asked me how other people can differentiate our inclusive kind of Christianity from those practices and practitioners of the faith who are exclusive in word, in deed, and institutionally. I thought that it was an excellent question and I thought that it was a question that pierces into the heart of our understanding of the Pentecost faith. After all, another miracle of Pentecost is the successful proclamation of the Gospel. People weren't just getting chummy over a block

party; it wasn't a rock concert. Although they came to Jerusalem for another religious holiday, the giving of the Spirit radically altered the nature of the holiday. In this giving of the Spirit and the outpouring of tongues of fire this diverse crowd came to know Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the prophets of Hebrew Bible and the Saviour of the world. The proclamation of Christ crucified and risen became central to the understanding and the unity that broke out on that day.

We who are part of the progressive side of the Christian church in America, we know that what we're doing is fundamentally about the re-evangelization of our nation and of our world. We are about the proclamation as we received and understood it from the life and work of Jesus Christ, to the salvific work of his death, to the redemption of his Risen Life, and as all of that was made manifest in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We aren't inclusive because that's somehow a new understanding of what went on in the first century. We're inclusive in all measures of the church because that's how we understand how things were in the very beginning. Sure, the men get to do all of the talking but they didn't just envision the faith for themselves. The Spirit was poured out on all people: young, old, master, servant, male, female. OK. So it doesn't say gay or straight or black or white or brown, but the idea is fundamentally the same. Jesus came, then the Spirit (the Intercessor) for Christ came in his permanent stead until his return. With the gift of that Spirit understanding and unity poured out in a way that is truly comparable with the ways that we understand the beauty of diversity and the real manifestations of social equality in our modern times. So, in case I never actually answered the question, how do people know the difference between inclusive and exclusive Christianity? We tell them and we show them at every possible opportunity. We are on a mission to re-educate the world and to give Christians a new, long overdue reputation overhaul.

In the past couple of weeks I've been doing a couple of different projects to organize my sermons. Sandi Y---, Kate C---, and Karl B--- have been very instrumental in helping me with this. One of the things I've been doing in this big organizational effort is that I've been trying to pull various sermons out from the big pile of sermons and get a good representation of topics to go in a broad range of sermons for the church website. In doing so I've tried to find "a gay sermon," in other words, a sermon about why we're Open & Affirming and what our commitments to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are. I haven't yet found a gay sermon. It's not that I haven't preached about this topic and our understanding of the inclusion of the body of Christ. It's just that there's not a sermon that I've found that is stand alone, all by itself discussion of inclusion of those who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation. This could be a big omission on my part in all actuality. However, when I mention LGBTQ stuff, I mention it in the context of the subject of ecclesiology- the study of the church/ the theology of the church. What I'm saying is that the way I represent it and the way that I understand that this church wants it represented is that gayness is not

a separate issue. There's no gay sermon per se because there's no gay issue. There's no singular gay sermon nor a singular gay issue because the whole LGBTQ category falls squarely into the Pentecost category of being church. There's no more of an issue for someone to be gay and to be a Christian than it is for someone to be old and be a Christian. There's no more issue of someone to be transgender and to be ordained than there is an issue of someone being a heterosexual ordained woman. That there no more of an issue for a very poor person to be loved and accepted by God than it is for a politically, financially elite person. There's no gay sermon because there's no gay Pentecost. For that matter, there's no straight sermon or no white sermon or no female sermon because there's no straight/white/female Pentecost. The incredible diversity and the incredible mix of people were present at the birth of the church. What we're doing is not innovative or single-issue driven. What we're doing is trying to fulfill that which is part and parcel of the Spirit's inclusive brew that has been bubbling since the beginning.

In some of my continuing education as well as in my personal therapy, I've been reading and discussing methodologies of change. In a classic book by Dr. Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus, <sup>1</sup> the author describes humanity's resistance to change in this way: *pardon the outmoded language*

**Like Darwinian evolution, individual change happens almost imperceptibly, with much trial and error. The individual instinctively resists mutation. He may live in a kind of swamp, but it is his swamp; he knows where everything is, what's in all the bogs and marshes. To leave his swamp means venturing into the known and perhaps falling into an even worse swamp. (89)**

Institutions function the same way. We are slow, oh so slow to change, but the good thing is that the God we worship is the God of change. God is the God of the winds of change. Of tongue of fire. Of outbursts of understanding and unity. That's who God wants God's beloved church, the body of Christ, to be: places of unity, places where hearing and understanding each other is valued and practiced, places where all people are loved and respected, places of energy and social reform, and places where inclusivity is an expectation, not an innovation.

May the winds of change blow. May we be smart enough and adventuresome enough to follow them wherever they go. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [I Hate You- don't leave me: Understanding the Borderline Personality](#)