

Acts 2:1-21, Pentecost Sunday, Year A, B, and C

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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This text stands as a book end to the story of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). In Babel, the story begins with one language and a common understanding and purpose, but ends with many languages, confusion and scattering. In Acts the story begins with many languages, and ends with many languages, but contains in the middle a common hearing about God's deeds of power (verse 11).

Unfortunately, unlike the story of Babel, this story does not contain within it any cautionary tale against human hubris. It is absolutely crucial in reading this text aright to truly pause and ponder the question asked in verse 12, "What does this mean?"

The fact that the question gets asked, and that more than one explanation is offered ("They're just drunk. No they're not."), ought to caution us that not even the full on power of the Holy Spirit compels a common understanding. We might all hear the same words - each in our own language - but we will not all hear and understand exactly the same meaning. The "problem" with life is never just a technical one - if only we could all just speak the same language. The "problem" with life is always, "What does this mean?" And that, in a nut shell is what the last 2,000 years have been about.

I think I'll still stand by my Pentecost 2006 sermon as a reasonable take on this text: [When The Spirit Comes](#). Check it out and see if you catch my meaning. ;-)

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