

So about a year ago, I brought a book to our Elders' Meeting. It was the workbook for the confirmation curriculum that Concordia Publishing House had recently published. And I was bringing it to the Elders' because I wanted them to see it and give their opinion of it before I moved ahead ordering all the materials I would need for Confirmation class in the fall.

And Jason Linneman looked at it and just laughed. “We didn't use anything like this when I was confirmed.” He said. “They've got all these cartoons and object lessons. Back in my day, we just had our catechism and a Bible.” He wasn't opposed to the workbooks, mind you. He just found the differences to be amusing.

Then again, the confirmation class that Jason went through was different than the generation that came before him. Which was different than the generation before that. Each one trying to adapt to the learning styles of the youth of that era. Each one translating God's Word to the ears of those hearing it. Because God's Word is meant to be translated.

We see that in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The disciples are all together in one place. Most likely locked up and hidden in a room for fear of the Jewish authorities. And the Spirit comes to them in the sound of rushing wind and the sight of burning flames that rest on their heads.

As the Spirit of God had once spoken to Moses through a bush that burned but was not consumed, so he now brought his fire to the heads of those twelve men. Not to consume them, but to speak through them to the people of Jerusalem.

But it was what they said that caught everyone off guard. Because they spoke in different languages. Up to this point, these men probably spoke the local language, Aramaic. They might have also spoken Greek. Maybe even a little Latin.

But after the Spirit comes, they speak 15 different languages. And Luke, the author of Acts, wants us to realize how amazing this is. Because he spells it out for us. “*Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.*”

God's Word is meant to be translated. It's meant to be translated into other languages. It's meant to be translated into other cultures. And right now, there are a lot of cultures in the United States. And that's hard for the Church to deal with. This country has always been called a melting pot. We're a nation of immigrants. It's almost a point of pride to know where else in the world your ancestors came from.

And I know, for myself, most of my ancestors came from Germany. The Ketelsens are from a region called Schleswig-Holstein right on the northern-most border. They came with several families in the late 19th century and settled in northeastern Iowa. And for those families, that area became a little pocket of Germany.

And so even though we were this grand melting pot of a nation, for a long time the Church didn't need to melt with it. Because if you were an immigrant from England, then you went to the Episcopal church. And if you were an immigrant from France, Italy, or Ireland, then you went to the Catholic Church. And if you were an immigrant from Northern Germany or Scandinavia, then you went to the Lutheran Church. And if you were an immigrant from Southern Germany or Switzerland, then you went to the Presbyterian Church. And so on.

We never learned how to speak a different cultural language. To the extent that I actually grew up in a Lutheran Church that still occasionally conducted worship services in German. And it wasn't that long ago, relatively speaking, that LCMS confirmation classes were being held in German. We were so determined to resist translating God's Word into any other language or culture.

The problem is that the Spirit translates the Gospel whether you want Him to or not. Those disciples in the upper room were not prepared for Pentecost. They were prepared to lock themselves up and stay there until the authorities stopped looking for them. But when the Spirit came, they spoke.

Just as Eldad and Medad did in the Israelite camp. These were two men who probably thought that they had missed out on an amazing opportunity to meet with the Spirit of God. They didn't go to the Spirit. But the Spirit still came to them.

That's how the Church works. That's how the Church has always worked. It's a collection of men and women who are completely unprepared to speak God's Word... until they do. And yes, we do get a say in the matter. Sometimes.

Jonah put off preaching to the Ninevites for quite some time. Peter had a perfect opportunity to preach the good news and instead openly denied his Lord. Paul persecuted the church every chance he got for years before God changed his heart. And the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has, at times, done a very poor job of translating God's Word into today's cultures.

I'm not saying you're going to walk out of this church today and suddenly begin singing like David or preaching like Paul. What I am saying is that you cannot quench your thirst without a river flowing from your heart.

Did you notice that in our Gospel lesson? It's a tiny lesson. Only three verses long. But it says so much. It says that our Lord came to quench our unquenchable thirst. That when He comes to us in His Word, when He comes to us in His Body and Blood, He gives us a drink so that we're never thirsty again.

A drink that satisfies our hearts with good things. With God's forgiveness and compassion. With faith in His death and resurrection. With hope at His return. And joy in knowing that we will live again. He satisfies our thirst for the temporary, sinful things of this world. And he gives us something eternal.

And yet, it doesn't end there. Because the water he gives us doesn't end with us. It becomes a river flowing from our hearts. And that river is not for our benefit. Our thirst has already been quenched. We'll never be thirsty again. No, this water inside of us is for everyone else. This water that flows out of our hearts is living water for a dying world.

And John himself spells this out for us. Jesus was speaking of the Spirit, which had not yet been given. But which was given on Pentecost morning. And 3,000 people were saved that day. 3,000 people were baptized. 3,000 people had their thirst for God's Word quenched by twelve men. Who started that day hiding in a room. And it all happened because a few men spoke to people in a language they could understand.

This past year, in our confirmation class, I've done my best to speak a language that our youth could understand. Sometimes I was successful. Sometimes I was not. Just as sometimes you understand my sermon. And sometimes you do not.

I've done my best to let that river of living water flow out of my heart to all of you. And I've done that so that all of you (especially our five confirmands today) may go out from this place and let that same living water flow from you as well.

Flow into your homes. Into your jobs. Into all the summer activities that you're so eager to get back to now that our state is reopening. Let it flow out of you to peoples and cultures that I can't speak to. But you can. You can be the one to translate God's Word to them.

Because Moses' prayer has been answered. All God's people are prophets. On Pentecost morning, the Lord showed that He has put His Spirit on all of us. He has poured out His Spirit on all flesh. That we may be a river of life to the world. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Amen.