

My Franklin translator was very popular in Germany. One couple in particular, Herr und Frau Schmidt were particularly intrigued. They were a charming couple who had a lovely old farmhouse with a large tiled stove for heat in the living room. They found it hard to believe that such a small device as my translator could include so many words in three different languages. To put it to the test, they asked me if it knew the German word for “tiled stove”. They were absolutely delighted when “Kachelofen” appeared in the little window.

Apparently, the lesson stayed with them. When I was preaching for the last time before leaving to return home, they had an usher bring me a goodbye card and told him to say it was from “Herr und Frau Kachelofen.”

And the technology is getting even better. Most online pages can now be translated. Google is working on earbud technology that offers real time translation between speakers of two languages. What's more, Waverly Labs has developed an earpiece they're calling Pilot which is inserted into the ear. Each of the two speakers in a conversation must wear an earpiece and then they can begin to chat. For now, the set of languages is limited to English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, but additional languages are coming soon. The makers of the Pilot, which is on sale in pre-order for only \$199, claims it is able to translate speech like the Universal Translator gadget in *Star Trek*. Or so says their website.

Now think about our first lesson today. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and suddenly couldn't stop talking. When they began to speak to the throngs gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world, listeners who didn't expect to understand a word the apostles were saying were amazed to hear their own language! Of course, neither the apostles nor the Jewish worshippers who had poured into Jerusalem from all over the world had a Pilot in their ear. So what *did* they have in their ears?

It would be more accurate to ask what they had in their hearts and infused throughout their souls. They had the Holy Spirit -- that's what they had. It was the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, who on that day launched a new “app” that would, in the words of some observers, turn the world upside down! (Acts 17:6).

So if today is the birthday, or better yet, the baptismal day of the church, it might be a good time to ask ourselves, “What is the church?”

The church is people. The text today says nothing about the church. The word “church” is not mentioned. In the Greek parlance of the day, the word *ekklesia* had no religious connotation. It only meant an assembly of people. The word did not refer to an institution. It did not denote an organization. It was not descriptive of a building dedicated to religious ceremonies. A church was simply a gathering of people. The church is people.

At first, these people numbered 120 souls -- give or take (1:15 says “about”) -- of whom 12 were designated “apostles.” These 12 would be the ones specifically “sent” to preach and proclaim. The others would serve in different ways. Our text says that they were “gathered together.” This, then, was the first meeting of the *ekklesia*, the church.

It was a small “church.” Just 120 people. No pastor, no church council, no committees, no building, no pews, no hymnals. Just 120 people in a second-floor rented room ... filled with the Spirit.

The church is ordinary people. Even more remarkable is that they were unremarkable. The founding members of this *ekklesia* were not the best and the brightest. They were not the kind of high-powered tech wizards you find in Silicon Valley, on faculties of universities or at roundtable discussions in conference rooms of multinational corporations.

Why do I make this point? Certainly *not to say that these people were ignorant, unintelligent or gullible*, or that such qualities are in any way prerequisites for being spiritually powerful. Not at all.

It's just that they were -- shall we say -- ordinary folk. Good people. They hadn't been *trained* to be filled with the Spirit. You can't get training in the Holy Spirit. There's no app for the Holy Spirit. There's no tutorial for the Holy Spirit. They had not gone to university or seminary.

You could argue that the apostles, in their lives as disciples with Jesus, had received *some* training. But a lot of good that did them! At the end, even Jesus confessed that in spite of their enrollment in a three-year internship, they *still* didn't understand the Scriptures. They fell asleep during prayer time. They were still expecting Jesus to launch a political coup. They didn't "get it."

And when it was over, they went back to their homes. They returned to their day jobs, hoping that they could live somewhat normally again. Because "normal" was comfortable for these people. It was who they were. Normal. Normal -- until filled with the Holy Spirit. They were not remarkable people until the Holy Spirit came upon them.

So you could say that the *church is unremarkable people doing remarkable things*. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things. And the only common factor is the Holy Spirit. Peter, who had quavered at the pointed finger of a servant girl only weeks before, now began preaching fearlessly. He would later stand up to the Sanhedrin, the most learned body of men in Judea -- perhaps the world. He, just a fisherman, lecturing scholars of the Torah on the Messianic passages of Scripture, and what it means to obey God rather than humans.

The church is ordinary people doing extraordinary things -- *united in a common cause*. The key word is "united."

They had no Universal Translator, but they all understood the language the Holy Spirit was speaking. And when they spoke, everyone else understood as well. And in this work, they were united.

They were united in their *message*. What Peter has to say in our text and the verses following makes it clear. The message is Jesus. Jesus was alive. Then he was dead. He is alive again. And everyone who calls on Jesus will also be alive -- eternally alive! This was the core message. No translator needed. When the people of God remember that it's all about Jesus, everything else seems to work out.

They were not only united in their message, but in their *mission* as well. As far as we know, they did not spend the weeks leading up to Pentecost preparing proposals. They did not draft an open letter to the people of Jerusalem. No mission statement with goals, objectives, sections, articles and bullet points. No one put together a PowerPoint presentation.

They no doubt recalled what Jesus said before his departure. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Pilot may prove to be an extraordinary translation device and a boon to tourists everywhere! But it is not likely. It's been more than two years since Waverly Labs made the announcement. No product has reached the marketplace. That this "Pilot" will ever be developed is in doubt. It may not be much more than a great idea. The fact checker *snopes* says the technology itself is "unproven".

But the Holy Spirit launch on Pentecost was a huge success. And in the church, our "translator" is the Holy Spirit, the one Jesus said would be our guide leading us into the truth.

It is the Holy Spirit who will remind us that we are unremarkable. It is the Holy Spirit who will empower us to do extraordinary things.

It is the Holy Spirit who will unify us in both message and mission.

Pentecost is a time to revisit what it means to be faithful to our core values and mission.

The Holy Spirit is our Pilot -- not inserted in our ears, but in our hearts and lives.

Pastor Keith