

Love Languages

Pentecost 2023 – Acts 2

So what do you know about *Love Languages*?

You've probably heard the term before,

it's been kicking around our culture for thirty years now.

Thirty years ago was when a marriage counselor named Gary Chapman

wrote a book introducing the idea that there are five love languages.

He based this on what he'd observed among couples for a lot of years.

And as every author dreams of – the book took hold,

sold a gazillion copies and keeps selling,

and the whole idea of Love Languages slipped into our common parlance.

If you *haven't* come across it, here's the premise:

it's that people have different ways that they express love to their partner.

The five Love Languages that Chapman observed were

Acts of service – as in, I put gas in your car, hon!.

Quality time – just being there, sitting on the couch together.

Words of affirmation – oh sweetie, you look amazing!

Physical touch – self-explanatory.

And gifts – hey sugar, I got you that cordless circular saw you wanted!

(sorry, that one was actually just a personal hint – I could really use a new saw)

So, these are all ways that people express their love –

where it gets tricky, as Chapman pointed out,

is when the language you prefer to *express* your love

is not perhaps the language your partner prefers for receiving love.

Perhaps you simply want some time together,

and your partner keeps showing up with chocolate.

Or maybe you would really like some chocolate

and aren't so excited to discover your gas tank's been filled again.

This is no less true in the Parsonage than in any other household.

I trend towards acts of service as my love language –

as in “The garage door is working again!”

“I fixed the doorbell, honey”!

Also, I just like fixing things.

None of which conveys love nearly as well as if I actually write some words of affirmation – David likes words!

And the reverse is true too – David writes beautiful words to me, and I –

well, actually, I really like those beautiful words. That works.

Bottom line of the Love Language concept

is that you have to figure out what language your partner hears best, and how to express Love in a way that it will be truly felt, truly heard.

Which, in a very roundabout way, brings us to today's scripture.

That scripture which all of you helped us to read.

The story that we read together is the story that Christians all over the world today are reading.

Today is Pentecost Sunday,

and what we remember on this day every year

is what happened fifty days after the first Easter.

On that day, it says, Jesus' followers were kind of just sitting around wondering what to do next.

They knew what they were supposed to do,

but they didn't know how to do it.

What they were supposed to do was tell people about God's love.

The last thing Jesus had said to them was

“get on out there and spread the word.”

But there was this logistics problem.

Jesus' followers only spoke Hebrew,

Hebrew with a Galilean accent.

How on earth were they supposed to go and preach God's love to people who wouldn't understand them?

Google Translate was not a thing.

And that's when it happened.

Suddenly, the story says,

the disciples were knocked off their feet by a rush of wind,

a blast of the Holy Spirit blowing through the windows and through the room,

and

a feeling like fire came upon them –

that's why all our decorations on Pentecost are red like flame.

And then, the story says, they began to speak, and what they spoke was no longer Hebrew,

but things like Phrygian and Libyan and Medean and Egyptian.

In fact the Bible story goes into excruciating detail

listing the 14 different languages those disciples suddenly began to speak in,

like Cappadocian and Pamphilian – I was merciful on you and edited it down to four.

So, with this miraculous ability to speak all kinds of language, the disciples hurried outside,

and started to talk, to anyone who would listen.

They began to tell a story, a story of love.

They began to talk about a man named Jesus

who was the very presence of love,

who brought healing and miracle

and the promise that life never ends.

They told the story of God's love to anyone and everyone that day

because God's Spirit spoke through them,

and God's Spirit that day spoke every language needed.

Every language needed.

And people listened, and believed ...

And that day, the story goes on to say, that day three thousand people became followers of Jesus

and the church was born.

You learn a lot about God from this story.

You learn that God will do whatever is needed for people to be able to hear the story of Love.

That God will speak in any language needed.

God wants to be known, and wants to be known for love.

And to do that, God is *still* speaking every language.

Just as on that day long ago,

God is speaking every language needed to make sure we hear.

Which is why I started off talking about love languages.

God is at work all the time to speak to us in the language we most want to hear,

most need to hear.

God doesn't just have five love languages:

God speaks to each one of us in the way we need to hear.

Whatever it takes for you to hear God's word of love,
God is willing to try it.

Whatever language God needs to use, God will use it.

God speaks to us in the language of sermons and scriptures and
songs and prayers, sure,

but God also speaks in the words of a trusted friend and the words
of a stranger.

God speaks in the pages of books and in music that makes us weep.

God speaks in the language of sudden joy
and even in the language of grief,

the sorrow that lets us know the depth of our loves through the
depth of our loss.

God speaks in the language of creation's beauty,
of rainbows and sunsets,

but God also speaks when you're just doing the laundry.

God speaks in the happenings of our lives
and in the deep stirrings of our hearts..

God speaks every love language needed,
to make sure we hear the same good news that those folks two
thousand years ago needed to hear:

that we are known and cherished, held and loved,
forgiven, adored.

God will use any love language to speak that good news into our
hearts.

And that's not news we're supposed to sit on.

Jesus' followers two thousand years ago
were empowered by the flame of the Spirit
to tell out the story of Love.

Well, we've got that same Spirit at work among us.

And we've got that same story of Love to tell.

So, we too, are called

to speak love to the world around us
in whatever language we'll be heard.

In whatever Love Language works.

Through acts of compassion, yes,

through words of forgiveness.

Through the patience of listening to someone who needs us,

through our prayers for those who are hurting.

Love can be spoken through a hammer on a nail on a new roof,

or flowers at the front door.

Love can be heard in voices speaking for the voiceless,

through a meal served in a shelter,

a hand held at a hospital bedside.

For those who know themselves to be loved by an amazing God,

there is no end to the love languages

that can be found to express that.

Saint Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying

“Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”

And words are often *not* necessary

to preach the Gospel of Love.

One of the most powerful stories I ever heard
about love and compassion conveyed without words
was a story from Somalia,
a country which has endured years and years of a neverending war,
and human rights abuses.

And the story was of two men,
imprisoned for speaking out against the government.

One was a doctor, Dr. Adan, the other his friend, Mohamed.

They were thrown into tiny, concrete cells,
squalid and roach-infested.

And though their cells were next to each other,
they were not allowed to call out to one another.

But they soon discovered that if they knocked on the wall between
them,

the guards didn't hear that.

So they would knock on the wall just to let each other know that
they were there.

And this was especially important for Mohamed, because despair was taking hold of him.

And when he would feel himself slipping, he would knock, and Dr. Adan would knock back, and it would help him.

Eight months into their imprisonment,

Dr. Adan figured something out.

They could tap out the *alphabet* to each other.

One for A, two for B, and so on.

And if they could do that, they could tap words to each other.

So they did.

Again and again Mohammed would tap “I’m afraid,”

“I can’t sleep,”

and the doctor would patiently tap back words of comfort.

“I’m here. I’m listening.”

But the doctor was worried.

His friend Mohammed was clearly slipping into a darker and darker place,

and the doctor's words, tapped through the wall,
didn't seem to be enough.

Here's where the story gets quite extraordinary.

The doctor had been permitted to bring one book with him into
prison.

He had brought, of all things, *Anna Karenina*,
the lengthy novel by Leo Tolstoy.

And he decided that the only way to keep his friend
from descending into deep despair
was to read him the book.

By tapping out the words letter by letter by letter.

Eight hundred pages. Three hundred and fifty thousand words.

And that's what he did.

That's what Dr. Adan did.

Night after night,

he wrapped a scrap of cloth around his hand,

and tapped out *Anna Karenina* letter by letter by letter.

And Mohamed sat on his side of the wall, enthralled,
while the book was read to him

through muffled taps on a concrete wall.

For months and months and months.

Each day giving Mohamed something to look forward to,
each day keeping him from hopelessness.

Anna Karenina is not the most cheerful of books –
but Mohamed was captivated by the characters,
and Tolstoy's words made the walls of his cell drop away.

The men were both released years later
and only then, of course, did anyone hear this story –
of Anna Karenina in Somalia,
of this extraordinary doctor
who tapped out one million letters on a concrete wall
to tell a story.

To tell a story as an act of compassion.

As a gift of love. A love language unlike any other.

There is no limit to the ways in which love can be spoken.

And, in the end, that's what the story of Pentecost tells us.

That God will use any language God chooses to speak love to us,
and that we are to speak love to others in any language we can find.

God uses every "love language" there is to make sure we know
that we are written on the palm of God's hand,
each one of us.

All we have to do is listen.

And when we've heard the story, then it's our turn to tell it.

To tell love, to live love, to shout love, to be love.

In every language we can find

in the power of the Spirit, in every moment of our lives. Amen.