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## Sermon

### *'When God Came Down Like Fire: He Breathed on Them'*

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#### ::: ZERO :::

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*"Grace to you and PEACE from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

*1 Co 1:3. (NRSV)*

#### ::: ONE :::

*'When God Came Down Like Fire:  
He Breathed on Them'*

We have heard the Pentecost story from Acts.

*But, "What does this mean?"*

This whole happening... *What does it all mean?*

This is the question asked by the spectators watching what happened to Jesus' disciples on the day of Pentecost.

We may also ask this question today.

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Isn't this strange? Unexplainable?

*"What does this mean?"* What is happening here?

## ::: TWO :::

First of all, there is a violent roar—like a storm rising. The Spirit of God descends on the disciples like fiery tongues. And the disciples begin to speak in foreign languages.

Anyone who spends some time alone in a foreign country where they cannot speak their own language, but have to speak in a *foreign* language, quickly realise that the own mother tongue is something *very* special.

If you then hear a few sentences in your own mother tongue—somewhere, it immediately raises your attention.

And it is so good to exchange a few words and sentences in your own native language.

It takes a long time to *live* in a language that is not your mother tongue, even up to the point where you no longer notice that it is a foreign language. It really takes a *long* time ...

### ::: THREE :::

The roar in the sky now attracts a whole crowd of people who come from foreign countries. They now hear the disciples speaking in *their own* language.

Most of them are astonished, perplexed. Probably the quite disturbed ones begin to mock: "*They are probably drunk.*"

Where your mother tongue is spoken, you experience a piece of home. That's exactly what happens here.

### ::: FOUR :::

But many different languages are spoken. Strictly speaking, all the peoples from the known world of that time are listed here.

They all find a home here through the work of God coming down in his Spirit.

Where the Spirit of God works and the gospel is understandably preached, people find a home—they realize where they belong.

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Yet the situation is too strange for many of the bystanders.

Those weird speakers there,...

... are they drunk?

...are they not completely sane.

... don't they have far too much nonsense mind?

... they will also learn that God does not work  
that way.

... we will get them back to their senses.

That which must not, cannot be.

Unfortunately, this does not apply so easily  
when the Spirit of God is at work.

WHEN GOD COMES DOWN LIKE FIRE HE BREATHES ON  
PEOPLE, BREATHS HIS BREATH INTO PEOPLE. And his  
Holy Creator Spirit works in a way that does  
not so often not quite fit into the given frame.

He often works so freely, and independently  
that it may seem too uncontrolled or unclear to  
what I am used to.

And also, I might easily be caught up in the  
idea that the Spirit of God may only work in the  
way I imagine.

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∴ FIVE ∴

Yet, the Spirit of God speaks to people in so many different languages. Languages that people really understand and feel at home in.

- For some, he speaks in clear words, to the point, arguing well.
- For others, he speaks freely, in a torrent of words, with great enthusiasm.
- For others, he is very quiet, leaving long pauses of reflection and contemplation.

This may sound almost dangerously arbitrary again. So many different ways...

But *what God's Spirit says* will always be a speech of God's love, hope, peace and justice.

This is not as the German idiom says Friede-Freude-Eierkuchen-Gerede—no 'peace and joy and egg pie'<sup>1</sup> talk.

Things can get really heated—even among disciples of Christ. We can also argue about opinions and views.

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<sup>1</sup> 'love, peace, and harmony'

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But at the end of the day, the goal is not a separation, but finding a new common way with Christ at the centre,  
with God's word of love, peace and justice at the centre,  
...not some love, peace and harmony talk,  
...and not human opinions or convictions which we declare the new commandments.

We are not called to *accept each other's opinion*, BUT TO LOVE each other—even our enemies. And the God who comes down, breathes his Spirit of exactly this love on us, into us.

Speaking out of love we don't state:  
*"This can't be."*

We rather ask:

- “Why do you do it why do you think this way?
- “This could also be right,  
    I had never seen this way!
- Can I help you somehow?
- Could you help me to understand  
    your thinking on this?
- Maybe you also understand that for me  
    this and that is not so easy?

Love determines the work of God among us. And in the end, what we say and do is about others experiencing the love of God which he breathes into us through his Holy Spirit.

### ::: SIX :::

Let us have a look at the Pentecost story once more:

Peter appears as being very wise. In this—maybe very disturbing scene—he sees a promise fulfilled.

*He says, "Here is fulfilled what the prophet Joel promised: Your sons and daughters will speak by divine inspiration ... To all the men and women who serve me I will give my Spirit, and they will speak on my behalf."*

Remarkable words.

Peter stands, against all opposition and against the critical enquiries, and has the disciples' backs.

They all speak different languages and thus address very different people.

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And Peter quotes the prophet Joel and says that the *young*, the *sons and daughters* are being addressed in particular.

So be open especially for the testimony and the words of the young people—the new and creative words of faith the young people speak.

Isn't this a wonderful thing?

A community of Christians who can lovingly accept each other. Very different people with very different ideas and visions—young and old together.

And yet there is trust among them that they are acting out of the Spirit of God. Because God comes down on all of us, breathing on all of us.

### ::: SEVEN :::

The Spirit of God blows like the wind. Always different. Sometimes light and peaceful, sometimes with great power.

As conclusion, I will tell you a little . It is rather, an episode from the Störtebeker Festival, which I have rendered from German to English.



The two noble pirate scoundrels, Störtebeker and Goedeke Michels' after overcoming danger in Spain, in desire for more adventure, accompanied by a great song of freedom, decide to sail together:

*"And where are we sailing to?"*

*"North?" – "And freeze to death on the way forth? Nah."*

*"South?" – "No way, it won't feed our mouth."*

*"East?" – "We'll find nothing important in Russia, and Poland."*

*"West?" – "Nay, that's not for the best!"*

*"So?" – "Let's leave it... to the wind."*

Amen.