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*Now It's Your Turn*

The Ted Talk “The Danger of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was presented in 2009. Has anyone seen it? In it she talks about how when we only know one narrow story about a particular community or person we risk missing out on the fullness of gifts they have to offer. Especially when it is born out of misunderstandings or stereotypes. We flatten out people and communities that have many dimensions of wisdom, experience, language, and culture.

They are amazed, perplexed, and astonished because not only do they hear people speaking in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them ability, but each person heard the testimony of what God has done in their own native language. That's the miracle.

Language can be used to exclude and draw boundaries around what is acceptable. Keep information from certain people. Or language can bring people together. Language can bring the gift of clarity even when spoken in more ways than we can count. Make it plain, we say. Imagine, on that day, the different kinds of people from other places with different convictions, testimonies, backgrounds, cultures, experiences, pieties, practices, and gifts to offer- all with the same fire dancing over their heads. The languages of our hearts are many. We need to hear them all or we remain incomplete. Like how every part in a music score brings color and texture. What are the different stories in this room and how they might deepen our collective understanding of God?

On Pentecost we celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit, not only long ago, but today. This is the promise that encounters us. The endlessly faithful God of all creation is the living God. The one who meets us in each moment and calls us into a new future shaped by God's own life.

Paul says it like this “there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit and there are many members but we are one body in Christ.” Less melting pot and more like a stew, where we all contribute our own spices and ingredients to the flavor of grace. Salt and pepper, paprika, dill, chili, turmeric, all-spice, ginger, garlic all adding their own notes to our multi-layered gumbo. What is the flavor that gives depth to your story? What do you contribute? It's all meant to be shared. Even in the same language, accents add complexity.

Left on our own we would rather stay inside. Behind locked doors. Palate unchanged. Spice cabinet bare. There is safety with familiarity. Fear and uncertainty are twin bolts on the doors of our hearts. Like those disciples that first Easter evening and fifty days later we are often stuck,

still, or trapped. There- the risen Christ always finds us. Moving through division, despair, doubt, and death to get to you. There, he speaks in whatever way you need to hear, always given for you. He breathes on the disciples and gives them gifts. He gives them peace. A peace as spacious as his arms that stretch out to welcome and embrace.

This peace gives you power to move in the confidence of our God who never leaves you or forgets you and is always taking towards resurrection. Like a gentle, mighty calm in the middle of a storm. He gives forgiveness. A future beyond what has held you captive. Your sins are gone. Taken away. So- now you don't have to let those sins or what others have done or said to you stay glued to your heart either. Let them go. They have no power over you any longer. They cannot live rent free in your heart any longer. Your life is of infinite value and you belong to God.

And- he gives God's own presence. The Holy Spirit now lives inside of you and will never move out. God's breath moving in rhythm with your own. Like God's own life and your flavor-- these gifts are always meant to be shared. Propel us out. Move us out into the open. To speak. To give this life away in our own language. Stew not melting pot. When Pastor Angela Denker was here she mentioned she tells our church's story when she travels. Some of you wondered-- what does she say?

I know one of them that moved her was how we acted with unimaginable risk. When we did something incredibly painful and divisive. We were moved by the spirit and fearless faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ even when others called it foolish or heresy. I've heard stories about how this room was beyond capacity as people walked down this aisle to vote on whether or not to leave the denomination that we were a pillar member of. You chose to step away from what you had known and put yourself out there because the Spirit had blown through here and rested on your head. The Holy Spirit is still breathing resurrection into our bones.

How might we claim our authority from the past to create a new future? What's next? We have been given all we need to tell our story (or a few of them). Not one of White Christian Nationalism but one of unconditional love and extravagant welcome for all people made known in Jesus Christ and an outright obsession with serving and standing up for every neighbor, no matter who they are. (After all, we are Lutherans) Well, that's how I would say it and how I see it lived out in you. Now- it's our turn.