

Incarnation Continues

Acts 2:1-13

May 31, 2020

The language we speak, whether it is English, Spanish, or whatever, is a tool that we use to express our thoughts, ideas and feelings. People living in different communities or countries speak different languages for communication. There are other means by which we communicate, such as symbols, pictures, body language or signs. However, the primary communication tool we use is language, both spoken and written.

Communication is slightly different. While language is a tool for communication; communication is a process of exchanging ideas, thoughts and feelings. One individual uses comprehensible words or signs to give a message to another person, and the recipient interprets the message. That is how communication happens. For a community or organization or its members to work together in harmony, communication is essential.

In communication, people exchange information or messages through various means. It could be verbal or non-verbal actions, like posture, hand signal or facial expression. People may use graphical and written illustrations like maps, charts, drawings or infographics.

For communication to happen there should be someone to send a message and another person to receive it. Both, the sender and the receiver, have to interpret the message to extract its meaning. Messages are conveyed back and forth through feedback. The feedback can take many different forms which include both verbal and non-verbal.

The most important thing in communication, however, is the fact that both the sender of the message and the recipient need to be able to interpret the message. If any party has a handicap in sending or receiving the message, because of language barrier, or auditory or vocal deficit, then it would make it more difficult for proper communication.

Ron Mehl (1944-2003) was a senior pastor of Beaverton Foursquare Church in Oregon. He had written many books. In his book, *Love Found a Way*, Ron Mehl tells of a time when the children's choir of his church sang for a service. Beaverton Foursquare Church is a huge congregation. There were six hundred children in the children's choir alone.

After the service, Pastor Ron learned that there was a boy in the audience who happened to be a deaf. What the pastor learned was that while the children's choir was singing songs there was no message for this poor child. He could not hear anything.

Then suddenly everything changed. The choir began to sing in this boy's language, singing the words with their hands as well as singing with their voices. They were singing the song, "Jesus, We Crown You with Praise," written by Lanny Wolfe. When they began singing the chorus, all 600 of them began to sing with the sign language:

"Jesus, we crown You with praise,
Jesus, we crown You with praise,
We love and adore You, bow down before You,
Jesus, we crown You with praise."

The children were singing this chorus with their hands and voices. The deaf boy suddenly stood up in his seat. His eyes lit up. The choir was singing to him. He could hardly contain his joy. His little hands began to sing as he signed along with the choir.

Pastor Ron adds this comment: "When the choir finished, that excited little boy thought the evening had been planned just for him. And I believe in my heart that he was right."¹

The message was communicated when it was transmitted through a recognizable means.

A similar thing happened on the Day of Pentecost. We cannot separate Pentecost from Jesus' ministry. In Christ, God entered the world. He entered the world to reveal God's nature to us and to draw us close to God. God came to us at Christmas in Jesus Christ. And we call this incarnation. And God came to us at Pentecost in the form of the Holy Spirit.

God came speaking our language so that we might know God and have life through him. Now, it is our mission to translate the Gospel into language that our friends and neighbors can understand as well. In other words, you and I have to be God's incarnation in the world.

¹ (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 1999), p.70-71.

The Gospel of John described Jesus this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and lived among us.”² And the Word continues to dwell among us.

The Christian faith began when the Word became flesh and lived among us. It continues when that same Word becomes flesh and lives in us. That is when you and I incarnate the same kind of love which Christ brought into this world. For this reason, the incarnation is not just the thing that happened in the past. It is something that still happens and needs to continue to happen today.

We are the body of Christ in this world. That is what the Bible calls us. The Bible says, “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”³ We are all members of Christ’s body. In other words, the Church is the extension of the Christ’s incarnation.

The Church is far from being perfect. It has its flaws, weaknesses, and inadequacies. Yes, I recognize that. We are inadequate representatives of Christ in every sense of the word. We are an imperfect incarnation of Christ.

Nevertheless, we are the Christ’s incarnation in the world. The Word became flesh in Bethlehem, and continues to become flesh in the world through us, Christ’s followers, who seek to live out God’s love in the world, no matter how imperfectly we may do so. The very purpose of the Church is to be Christ’s presence in the world.

Annie Johnston Flint wrote a poem about the task of Christ’s followers:

“Christ has no hands but our hands
to do his work today;
Christ has no feet but our feet
to lead men in his way;

He has no tongue but our tongues
to tell men how he died;
He had no help but our help
to bring them to his side.”

² John 1:1, 14.

³ 1 Corinthians 12:27.

“Christ has no hands but our hands...Christ has no feet but our feet...Christ has no tongue but our tongues...Christ has no help but our help.”

This poem reminds us of the duty and purpose of the Church. The duty and purpose are to be the embodiment of Christ’s love and his message of salvation.

A leader at a church conference told about his young son. One day, he came home from school with something he wanted to show to his Mom. “Mom, look at this. We are studying dinosaurs!” He showed her a picture of a gigantic titanosaur, a huge dinosaur towering over a two-story building. Then he asked his mother a difficult question, “When did we kill off all the dinosaurs, so that it would be safe for houses to be built and kids to play outside?”

“Well,” replied his mother, “we didn’t kill off the dinosaurs, and we don’t know exactly how they became extinct. Some scientists believe that it was a result of an ice age. Others suggest it was a result of a giant meteorite falling on the earth that caused lots of dusts that covered earth for many months which changed the climate and dinosaurs could not adapt and survive in the cold. Whatever the real cause was, it was the result of a tremendous climate change that allowed humans to build cities and children to play outside.”⁴

Then the leader went on to suggest that in a similar fashion, the task of the church is to change the climate so that the Gospel may flourish.

That’s a wonderful metaphor, isn’t it? The purpose of the church is to change the spiritual, social, moral and political climate of our world so that this world may resemble the kingdom of God, the world where God’s love and righteousness rule. That is the purpose of the Church. And we do this by our ministry and witness.

The church is not a place we go--the church is who we are! *Ekklesia*, which is a Greek word for “Church,” literally means “an assembly of people who are called out for a specific purpose.” That is who we are. We are the church that embodies God’s spirit to continue Christ’s work in the world. Through us, God’s incarnation continues.

⁴ The Rev. Robert Hansel. Cited by Philip W. Snyder,
http://www.stjohnsithaca.org/Sermons/2006Sermons/Sermon_10_29_06.html.