

Mummies are... what? I need you to pretend we're playing a word game, catch phrase to be specific, and I'm trying to get you to say a particular word. How would you finish this sentence?

Mummies are...?

The correct answer is mummies are dead. Easy enough if you are able to understand that I'm talking about ancient mummies, preserved and buried in Egypt. But Veronica, sweet Veronica, my dearest mother-in-law, when she heard this simple clue, two little words, coming from my sister-in-law's mouth, cries out "precious!" And she's not wrong mummies are precious. But because she misheard the slight nuance between mommies and mummies, and didn't pick up that we weren't all little British kids that called our moms "mummy," she was in an entirely different world in the game. The rest of us got "dead" pretty quickly afterwards. After a very good laugh.

When it comes to word games, clear communication is vital. When it comes to working on a team in any sense, communication is crucial. Whether you're tackling a school project and you're all pitching in to present about World War II history, or if you're a couple sitting in pre-marital counselling and then that same couple 5-years into married life, or if you're a bunch of architects handing out orders to the grunt workers about how to bake bricks and spread bitumen and keep a tower lined up, understanding one another, speaking clearly, having the same vision, using the same language is vital to success.

When it comes to the Tower of Babel, they had this plan. They wanted to make a landmark that would centre their people, the only people, even as they grew. They'd have a capital, of sorts, and in that city it would be so magnificent if the visual point, the middle of it all, reached to the heavens, as if it ascended to God. Then all the brothers and sisters and children and unending descendants would look in awe at what their fore-fathers accomplished, as they made a name for themselves; as they did what all humans are wont to do, defy God's will and command.

Adam and Eve, their first father and mother and yours, didn't take long to eat of the one tree off-limits. Their sin brought death into the world, and as their family grew so large, the sin became so horrendous, God chose to use a flood to wipe it all out. Only Noah and the 7 with him, eight in all were saved. Noah, said to have God's favour, said to be righteous, builds a boat, gathers the animals, and sails atop the waters as God makes a fresh start with the world.

As the waters subside and the new start begins, God makes a promise and a command. He will surely never destroy the world by flood again, and they are to, knowing how powerful and gracious God is to them, be fruitful and multiply, teeming over the earth.

"no," Noah's descendants say. "Let's stay here and build for ourselves a big tower." Only this time, with their rebellion getting out of hand, with their pride literally building to the heavens, God couldn't sweep it all away with a torrential downpour. His solid word prevented such an act. And clearly, even if He did do another reset, they'd only concoct their next scheme to deny Him and worship themselves. But God knows that the use of a common language is crucial to them achieving their lofty goal, even to their continued unity, and so He splinters them and forces them to separate where they had sought to remain united.

This tribe with this language goes north, that group with those verbs and nouns and sentence structures spread south. God makes His will happen even when His creation is dead set against it, but He knows this is best.

Especially since sin entered the world, this division is crucial, because not only would one language mean they could accomplish whatever their hearts desired, but the intentions, the desires of the hearts of man is evil from youth, God says to Noah. Not only did the people all speak Adamic, or Aramaic, or whatever language Noah taught to His children, we can see that the language they truly all speak is pride and arrogance, conceit and vanity and rebellion. This is certainly true after the splintering

as well, but at least they cannot work together to overthrow God, or rid their need of Him, as it seems with the Tower of Babel.

Now you have many groups, all speaking the same corrupted language in their own special ways, their unique dialects, if you will, but at least they aren't collaborating on heaven's downfall.

It's into this splintered world that the Christ enters, God coming down to the man who wanted to ascend to kill God, and He speaks a different language than the rest. It seems like, though He speaks Aramaic or Greek, very few can understand Him, and even those that can understand had to be taught. In a world where they can only comprehend self-preservation and greed, He speaks the language of sharing and service. In a world that appreciates pride and self-promotion, He invites children and outcasts and sinners to sit in His midst. In a world that knows only war and decay because sin turns brother against brother, Christ comes to bring peace and life, and this by doing the thing that makes the least sense to this world. Sacrifice.

Christ speaks in parables, and all are left confused, even his own disciples needing clarification about what His teachings mean. But the Word made flesh lives in an entirely different language. He knows that not even His closest followers can comprehend it, but He promises to send the Holy Spirit that all He has said, and what He meant by it all, would come to remembrance for them. They'd grasp the message He lived at last, and today, on the festival of Pentecost, such a prophecy comes to pass.

Peter speaks, and people from all over hear. It would be like me, opening my mouth on a street corner in some international city, but the French, the Germans, the Ethiopians, the Brazilians, and the Taiwanese answer my questions, even though we all only speak our local languages. As the tongues of flames fell and the Spirit dwelt in each person present, it was as if their ears were open so that they could hear what the group had to say, ultimately Luke tells us, so they could hear the mighty works of God. And Peter, as his sermon carries on, proclaims the mightiest work of God, Christ dying at the hands of sinful men, Christ dying for the sake of those who wanted Him dead, Christ rising to defeat death not

for His own sake but again for those who wanted to kill not only the man Christ, but the God of heaven and earth as well.

And the biggest miracle is not that they comprehended the vocabulary coming out of Peter's mouth, the sentence structure and the grammar and verb tenses, but that they heard the message, that it broke into their ears and hearts and could believe such a language. At Peter's preaching, 3000 converted, they repented and cried out what they should do and they were baptized then and there.

Today the same thing happens. Xavier has been worked on by the Holy Spirit, this situation and that conversation leading him to realize that he, like all the rest of us, is a sinner in need of a Saviour and that Saviour being none other than Jesus the Messiah, crucified and risen for him. The Holy Spirit, through people of all sorts, spoke the Gospel into his life and translated it so that he, a sinner, could understand not only the words but also the message, and the impact of such a promise.

And honestly, though he's the only one getting baptized today, the Spirit is doing the same thing to each of us right now. Even though I'm speaking English, and you're understanding English, the Spirit speaks and translates as the Word is read and received. We are being taught, as the disciples had to be taught, what the language of Christ and salvation is, because it's foreign to us sinners. We need to know the verbs of sacrifice and dying and rising and serving. We need to constantly be reminded of the grammar of salvation, of God as the actor and us the acted upon, the recipients and responding. We need to be immersed in the adjectives that describe who we now are. Redeemed. Beloved. Holy. Forgiven.

And being bilingual, sinner-saints until we die, we get the languages confused, the languages of our selfishness and Christ's selflessness, the language of sin and righteousness, the language of condemnation and salvation.

Luther teaches that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

The Holy Spirit has been faithful to translate Christ, the Word, to us. To give us faith over and over and over again. Though today may not appear quite so unique and spectacular as that first true Pentecost, the Spirit is doing the same work, making saints out of sinners, making alive those who are dead and dying, making brothers and sisters of Christ out of enemies of God. He teaches us to flee sin and to learn to serve, to trust in Christ through temptations and trials, to hope in a perfect future in spite of a decaying today. And He does this all as the Gospel is proclaimed and explained and received by you, His beloved.

And now, people all over the world, divided by distance and language and the sin that splinters us, we are invited to unity again. Though now we don't pursue our hearts' desires, for left on our own we will only begin building towers again. But speaking Christ's language, speaking the Word, we rejoice together in salvation, and we spread it abroad that others may join in our conversation.

Come, Holy Spirit and speak Christ to us anew. May we hear and appreciate what He has done for us, and may we receive and relish all the gifts He gives. Peace. Joy. Comfort. Love. Life. These are all ours because of Him who points us to Christ. And for that we thank you, God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.