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"Direct Communication from God" The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman
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Let's pray. Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Amen. Robin Wright, who played Jenny in the movie For a Scump, you know her, maybe her earlier role, she was on, I think, General Hospital in the 80s, but her breakout role was as the Princess Buttercup in Princess Bride, which I am contractually obligated to use an example in every sixth sermon. In 1987, this movie came out, and she had a relationship with a farm boy who worked Wesley on the farm where she lived, and she fell in love with Wesley, but she couldn't come out and say it, he was a lowly servant, so she would ask him to do things, you know, go slap the pigs or go, you know, kill a chicken, and he would say, as you wish.

And she realized, as he said, as you wish, what he really meant was, stop bossing me around. No, what he really meant was, I love you, and so she would ask him to do more things, he would say, as you wish, and she would know he was saying, I love you.

Now, if you are a therapist here, you know, this is a terrible relationship, because you are supposed to speak directly, we're grownups, we communicate with words, clear words, that mean what they say,

we don't use this indirect communication, and yet we often do. Now, the example in the Princess Pride, it's sweet, but often there are things where we really want to say something, but we can't bring ourselves to say it, clearly and directly, so we have these indirect methods, the dropping of the hints, the telepathic messages.

Sometimes you might leave a book lying around, just, you know, happened, oh, boundaries for husbands, how that get here.

There is the silent treatment also, very effective, the silent treatment, and if they ask you why you're upset, say, if you don't know, I'm not telling you, and then they really will understand.

Using a third party, I'm from a large Latino family, this is our favorite method, we tell somebody else something so that then they will tell you, but I don't actually have to have the congregation, but that actually knows no ethnic boundaries, that's something we're all good at.

In the workplace as well, not just in the home, we use indirect methods of communication, sometimes where your office is located, or

the org chart gets changed, and this is a signal that somebody is unhappy with you, in office space, which came out in 1999, Milton, the employee that nobody really liked, or could figure out what he was doing.

They could not bear them to have a conversation with them, so his boss just kept moving his cubicle, and finally he found himself in the basement.

And so he burned the office down, and I think the moral of the story is communicate directly, so you do not have arson, that's really what you want.

Today is the feast of Pentecost, this great holiday in the church, some of you got the Wear Red memo, others of you don't read the bulletin, it's fine, Jesus loves you too.

We put it on the front cover last Sunday, and this is a festival of remembering that God does not speak indirectly, but directly.

And I think that's good news, but first we have to talk about George Costanza, and then we can talk about why Pentecost is good news.

So in Seinfeld, George Costanza, in season 4, episode 22, the pilot, a special two-part episode, Jerry and George are pitching the idea for a show about nothing, basically their lives in the show, very meta, as they say, they're pitching an idea for this show to NBC executives. And it looks like the execs are really interested and are going to maybe produce the pilot, and George is talking to his therapist about this problem.

You know, why is it a problem? Well, that's what the therapist says, because he's saying they might pick up the show, what if it gets picked up, and the therapist says, that would be wonderful, you'd be rich and successful.

And George says, that's exactly what I'm worried about. God would never let me be successful. He'd kill me first. The therapist says, but you don't believe in God.

I do for the bad things. This is the George Costanza problem, that we have this sense that even if we don't believe in God, God is out to get us, out to punish us.

This may not come across as an actual articulated out loud, or even in your brain thought, God is out to get me.

Yet we do have this kind of unworthiness that is woven through a lot of what we do and say, which I feel like if you really pushed at it, really thought about it, allowed yourself to realize what you're thinking.

Any good therapist will do this. They'll say, okay, now, please verbalize what you're actually thinking, and let's tease that out a little bit more.

I see this come up often when you give someone a compliment, they sort of refuse to accept it. This unworthiness that's deep down.

Oh, you know, that's a nice jacket you have. Oh, this thing, it's, you know, Marshall's on clearance. You know, it's nothing. I stole it, actually. It's really, it's nothing.

You see this in other ways where people want to deflect the idea that they might be worthy and valuable and beloved.

I was talking to a woman recently who, when her daughter was very young, they had this health problem and needed surgery for it. And on Sunday before the pre-op meeting with the doctor on Monday, she went to church with this daughter and this church had a thing of, after communion, there was a group of people, a prayer team, you could go up and just receive prayer for whatever you needed. And so she took her daughter there for prayer and they lay their hands on her and prayed for her and anointed her with oil for healing. And this did not happen every time by any means, but what happened in this circumstance is the next day when she went to the surgeon for the pre-op meeting, the condition had disappeared. And this woman said, oh, this can't be a healing. God wouldn't do that for me. She went to her priest and said, you know, it's great. There's no longer a need for surgery. The doctors can't find anything. But I'm sure they just cleared up naturally, you know, it's just a coincidence that people prayed. And he said, no, God loves you and don't take away this possibility that God might have intervened in this special way here. And I think this gets to this big question. This is, I think, one of the fundamental questions of life. What does God think about you? What does God actually think about you? And there may be some of you here, dragged here under duress, who are not really people who believe in God. Just because you're in church, you know, I'm on to you. I know. I used to be one of you. Look what happened to me. And you may not believe in God, but, you know, so you'll talk about the universe. You know, this force that governs and holds all things together, that created all things and knows who you are and has some idea about what your life should be and wants to impact your life. And you can actually address this force and ask for things. And sometimes you might, it's not God. Yeah, yeah. Do you get how funny this is? Like we just changed the name for it. Anyways, it's funny to me. Anyway, they laughed at the 910. Even if you are a universe person or a God person or you don't know what you are, there is this sense even for George Costanza. You know, like it's out to get me. And so I think asking this question of how are you perceived? How does God regard you? Is God wanting to let the other shoe drop? Is God like some Wile Kiyote character after you, the road runner, always setting explosives in your path? What's God like? What does God want to say to you? Well, we get the answer in Pentecost. Well, lots of places. But Pentecost, I feel like it's so clear. It's like a big, holy spirit highlighter of how God feels about you. And this feast day, Pentecost, you know, the passage of the end. When the day of Pentecost came and you made sound like, well, Pentecost is this, it's the first Pentecost. It's this Christian festival. Like when Thanksgiving came, no. This is a festival that had been celebrated for centuries. It was a Jewish feast, the Feast of Booth, Shavot, and it was a first fruits,

early spring festival, 50 days after Passover.

So the Jews of those days, many of them still spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, some did not, and lots spoke Greek, the common language of that part of the world.

And so Pentecost, this feast of 50 days, that's the Greek name of the Feast, Pentecost. And so it's that big celebration that happens every year in the spring, 50 days after Easter, Passover.

And there they are gathered, and the city of Jerusalem is full of Jewish people who've come from all over the Mediterranean world and abroad to celebrate this holiday. Pentecost.

And they are all from different countries. Jews then, like now, live in lots of different countries, speak lots of different languages. And so they're there in Jerusalem for this festival.

And the disciples are staying in this little house, they're on the second floor, and they're waiting, just as Jesus told them to wait, you heard that read in John 15.

And then the Holy Spirit shows up, just this giant wind, as far as that's only gimmick I'll do today.

There's going to be no fire, so don't get your hopes up. But then fire comes down on the disciples, heads, and then they start speaking other languages, real languages.

And if you've been in a charismatic or Pentecostal church where people speak in tongues, the phenomenon that anthropologists of religion called Glossolalia, it happens in all religious traditions.

This happened in this church. It was a big charismatic removal. In the 1970s and 80s, we stamped it right out, so we no longer do any of that.

Don't get any ideas. No, I'm kidding. It was great. It's wonderful.

And so maybe you've been part of that. Maybe some of you still pray in tongues. Praise God.

But that is not what this is. Because those languages are usually not understood by the speaker.

You couldn't open up a textbook and find the grammatical structure of those things that you're saying.

These are people speaking actual languages, like I did at the beginning of the sermon. And they could be understood by the people who were there.

Now, those people likely spoke Greek or some language that could communicate with everybody around. But God, when God wants to announce how God feels about them, He wants them to hear it in their own language.

He wants to communicate directly and clearly in the language that goes straight to their heart. Some of you may speak other languages.

And usually you have one that is your main language, and then there's others you've learned later, and you kind of have to do a little mental gymnastics to translate in your head.

It's exhausting if you've ever lived in a foreign country. You spend all day speaking in this other language, and you come home to the people who speak your heart language. And it's just, ugh, it's a relief.

Because the words go straight to your heart. And this, when God wants to announce to the people in Jerusalem, He wants them all to hear it, and He wants it to go straight to their heart.

No dropping of hints, no subtle clues that they may or may not figure out, but He wants them to hear and know what He has done for them.

And specifically about what He's done in Jesus Christ. And we know that that's what it's about. It says in our reading we heard today, God's deeds of power. They began to speak about God's deeds of power. And that is true, but it's not just random deeds, you know, His creation of kangaroos, or the splitting of the red sea, or the time when He delivered the people of Israel in a great battle. Those are all great deeds. But that's not what this is about.

We know because Peter then goes on to preach a sermon. And the point of the sermon, what he says in that sermon, is that Jesus Christ has come. And so you are all called to repent and be baptized, just like we did in that font at the service right before this one.

In the name of Jesus Christ before the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That's what God wants to say to everybody in a language that they can hear right away that goes straight to their heart.

Come to Jesus, forgiveness of your sins is preached to you and to everyone. And you receive the Holy Spirit. God's presence actually in you. God wants to dwell in you. This is incredible. This is how God feels about you.

And God wants you to hear that right away in a language that goes straight to your heart. God doesn't want anything to get lost in translation.

You know, some of you understood the Russian, I spoke, maybe. More of you probably understood the Spanish I spoke. But for a lot of you, just random noises.

But what God wants everybody to hear in a language that goes straight to your heart is that you are loved, you are forgiven, that what Jesus Christ has done in his death and resurrection, defeating sin, death and the devil, that that is for you.

Jesus is the end of judgment. That's what those tongues of fire meant. Because fire is always in the Bible a symbol of judgment. Fire falls down from heaven, et cetera.

Fire is this refining fire that purifies by burning off all the bad stuff. Fire is judgment. And here the fire falls and they're not burned because the judgment has been dealt with by Christ's death on the cross.

There's no more judgment for you. Come to this great gift of God in Christ and know that you can receive forgiveness of your sins.

And this is such good news because we are people that always want to turn religion into stuff we have to do to make God happy.

We always want to turn it back into a to-do list because of this idea that God is out to get us that God is interested in making life miserable for us because we've done something bad at some point or just God is just vaguely displeased in general and you better work hard to get in God's good graces.

And I know this is true is because there is a 10-year cycle in the Christian publishing industry on spiritual disciplines and we are currently in a year 10.

So every decade or so it seems that there's a never-ending desire for a book to tell us how to be a better Christian in terms of spiritual disciplines.

And I love the spiritual disciplines, fasting, scripture memorization, praying, all these things that are part of what we do together giving generously to things that matter.

These are all the ancient disciplines of the faith and in every 10 years a book comes out whether it's Dallas Willard or Richard Foster, there's a new one that's just hidden everybody like wildfire these days, it's spreading.

And people are like, oh my gosh, we didn't know about this stuff before. Who knew? There were things to do.

And they're always taught in such a good and open-hearted way and if they're meaningful for you absolutely embrace and follow those paths. But no, I always see people receive those and think, oh God has more stuff for me to do to make him happy.

And that's how it begins to feel in their own lives. Again I know this because you always apologize for not coming to church when I see you at HEB.

Because you think that God is out to get you, you think God is keeping score and I as God's agent are the chief enforcer and I am judging you all the time.

That's not the message but we hear it in our brain all the time.

And this is why God wants to communicate directly that you are beloved, you are saved, forgiveness of sins is preached to you in a way that you are invited to receive it in a way that goes directly to your heart.

This is good news.

George Costanza is wrong.

The gospel is true and it is for you. Amen.