

Read also Isaiah 44:2-8. To see these symbols and today's skit, you can go to our web site, fpcd.org.

What is this symbol?  How about this one?  And this?  What about this? 

There are no words written on any of these symbols. How do you know what they are?

Here's one you should know about:       

This is the PC(USA) seal – See the cross. If you look closely, there's a triangle, representing the Trinity. Inside of it is an open book - the Bible. There's a pulpit, symbolizing the importance of preaching in the Presbyterian Church. The descending dove represents the gift of the Holy Spirit, and flames on either side of the cross, the inauguration of the church on the day of Pentecost. The fish and chalice represent the sacraments.

Symbols are important. They supersede language, education, and cultural barriers. They convey meaning.

God uses symbols to convey Himself to us. God's signs not only cross national and cultural barriers, but speak across thousands of years.

Let's think back to one of those ancient symbols God gave for Himself. Remember on Mt. Sinai when God appeared to give the law to Israel? What did the children of Israel see and hear?

- Fire
- Thunder and lightning
- Pillar of cloud
- Blast of a trumpet

God is loud. The Psalmist said, "Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him" (50:3).

God often shows Himself in powerful signs of nature. This summer I was in Kansas City and it stormed one day. Afterward, there appeared one of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen. A woman I was with saw it and was so caught up in its beauty that she began worshiping and praising God in response to that expression of God's presence.

And, once again with the dawning of this new age of the church, God's presence is made evident and that presence speaks loudly. Let's read it. READ Acts 2:1-13.

As hard as it was for the disciples to anticipate what Jesus meant before it happened, it's equally as hard for us to understand as we read this story. Let's think of these symbols of tongues of fire and a mighty wind as signs given to assure us and give us confidence.

John the Baptist said, "Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Lk 3:16). That's exactly how it played out.

How does that play out in 2010? How do we trust in the Holy Spirit's presence?

Of this we can be certain: God is the same yesterday and today.

Notice the intention of God within this passage. The Holy Spirit spoke to people from at least sixteen language groups that day. Jesus gave his followers the ability to communicate the good news to them.

God said through Isaiah, *Did I not proclaim my purposes for you long ago? You are my witnesses-- is there any other God? No! There is no other Rock-- not one! And I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants.* (see Isaiah 44:8)

God wants us to reach out to all nations with the hope of Jesus Christ. That's our purpose.

But we notice in this passage that there was a mixed response. Some were amazed. Others were perplexed and thought they were drunk. God did not leave them there with their misconceptions. Peter, through the Holy Spirit, stood up and explained this puzzling event.

READ Acts 2:14-17. Peter said – it's exactly what God told us in the Bible! God is fulfilling God's plans through us! And God's message extends hope to all peoples.

Jesus explained it the night before His death when He told the disciples, "No, I will not abandon you as orphans-- I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live" (Jn 14:18-19).

He was talking about this very event - the Holy Spirit coming to them.

Today we are not left alone. The Holy Spirit comes to us with the same purpose. But what does that mean exactly? Who is this Holy Spirit? (I'm glad you asked!)

Having the Holy Spirit must not be confused with the New Age philosophy of God simply being in us and our being a part of God, as if we are an extended expression of God. The Holy Spirit is a separate being from us; a part of the Godhead and the third member of the Trinity.

- The Holy Spirit is given by the Father and the Son and has been active in the world through people since the beginning: We just recited the Nicene Creed which says, "*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.*"
- The Holy Spirit is a heavenly gift, wholly separate from us, but comes into us and brings the presence and power of Christ. That's why we sing, "Spirit of God descend upon my heart." The Holy Spirit powerfully works in us.

- God described the Holy Spirit as a wind. That word in Hebrew is “ruach.” That’s the word used in Genesis 1 when it says “a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” It’s sometimes called the “breath of God.” John tells us “Jesus breathed on the disciples to give the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22).
- “Ruach” involves power and movement. Wind is powerful, and this was a rushing, violent, powerful wind that came on them. That movement imparts new life and healing energy.

That symbol tells us the Holy Spirit is not a wimp.

We can experience much more of God’s power and strength than we do. We need to seek the Holy Spirit, and invite the Holy Spirit into our lives. Jesus taught, “Ask, and God will generously give you the Holy Spirit” (Lk 11:13).

Then you can be changed just as Peter was.

Peter, the man who spoke up that day, was previously a wimp. But that has all changed. Now, he gets up boldly in front of a large crowd some of whom are laughing and saying, “They are drunk.”

Before, Peter denied his faith, and cut and ran when one young slave girl ask him if he was a follower of Christ.

Now, Peter spoke with power.

How are you at sharing your hope in Christ - like the “before” Peter or the “after” Peter? Would you like to experience that kind of transformation? Seek the Holy Spirit and gain passion and purpose, and powerfully live into what you believe.

As you came in this morning you were given a card to encourage you to invite someone to church. Imagine if it were easy to speak to all the different cultures in this neighborhood about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is present in you and will speak. Speak up! Some will resist. But many will respond.

What is your voice? Are you trying to find it? Ask for the Holy Spirit.

Many of you at FPCD are living out this message. The choir will present a concert on October 23 called “Who’ll Be a Witness?” They speak the “language” of music. The Stahls will tell Bible stories for that same event. They also work in Southeast Asia doing storytelling in native language groups. Michelle Petersen’s work is to teach people how to incorporate Bible stories into the artistic expressions of their cultures, as she works with language groups in Africa. Just like this story.

We saw an example this morning of the language of drama to speak to the 21st century. The Holy Spirit uses young and old alike to speak the language of the cultures around us.

Dr. Lamin Sanneh, of Yale Divinity School, speaks about Christianity's unique emphasis on sharing the Bible through mother-tongue translation. That comes right from this passage. No other religion does this. This is the work of God through the Holy Spirit because God wants to reach out to all people.

Our nation is becoming increasingly diverse. Whether on the other side of the world or right here in our own neighborhood, we must not ignore these nations. The Holy Spirit crosses those cultural barriers with the good news.

Here's the message we must share:

*God sent this incredible man, Jesus
It was God's plan from the beginning
Jesus lived, loved, healed, taught
Jesus was killed on the cross but God would not hear of it
God raised Him*

*When we believe, Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit
The Holy Spirit is His power and presence
Believe it and be joyfully saved*

Let that fire of a message burn in you too, in your own special way. This joyful gift is for everyone. It far exceeds living life for oneself; living for this world only; so with Peter, let's boldly "share it."

AMEN