

St Brandon's, Sermon for 24th May 2026: Feast of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21, John 20:19-23

God-Love Languages

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Before Jesus died, he promised his disciples that he would still be alive and at work in the world even after his death. He would live in them through the Holy Spirit which he would breathe into every disciple. The Holy Spirit would inspire and teach them, remind them of his words, enable them to be the Body of Christ as Church, and his hands and feet in his service.

Today we are celebrating the gift of the Holy Spirit that we too, receive first as the knowledge of God that brings peace that is beyond understanding, and the authority – imperative - to forgive.

Secondly, as we explore the faith more, we find a new language to use in his service. Not the ability to talk in tongues, although that occasionally still happens: there are reliable people who have witnessed this 'talking in tongues' to be not the mumbo jumbo we hear but a genuine, obscure language that is understood and translatable by someone of that native tongue. Most of us do not get the gift of talking in tongues but I believe we do all get our own new language for doing what Jesus promised would happen through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I'll explain what I mean using an analogy.

I wonder if you have come across 'The five love languages'? This is an American invention! Rachel Lunney introduced it into the Marriage Preparation days we ran at St Brandon's, and it was often the most useful and enlightening item for couples. I quote:

"The five love languages, introduced by Dr. Gary Chapman, define how people express and receive love. Understanding these can help strengthen communication and emotional intimacy:

- 1- Words of Affirmation: Expressing affection through spoken praise, appreciation, or encouraging words.

- 2- Quality Time: Feeling most valued when receiving undivided attention, such as engaging in meaningful conversations or dedicated dates without distractions.
- 3- Receiving Gifts: Feeling loved through thoughtful tokens, presents, or gestures that show someone was thinking of you.
- 4- Acts of Service: Preferring actions over words—doing helpful tasks that ease a partner's daily burdens, such as cooking or running errands.
- 5- Physical Touch: Communicating love through non-verbal, physical closeness like holding hands, hugging, or cuddling.

The idea is that each of us typically express our love in one or two of these ways as our default setting. Our 'language of love' defines for us, what we think 'loving' should look like; how we want to experience love from another and the way we 'do it'. Understanding that this will look different for different people, including the person you are about to marry, can be helpful in recognising when love is being communicated. Picture the scenario when a bunch of red roses is hurled back as a trivial offering, or putting up the shelf just isn't relevant or romantic.

I think the Holy Spirit confers on us a parallel sort of Language. A God-Love Language.

A God-Love Language might have five interpretations like these:

1 Words of Affirmation: Maybe you get a real buzz from building people up, encouraging them to take heart, to be bold and hopeful. To know God is near at hand and will help them; praying for and with them.

2 - Quality Time: Perhaps worship is your go-to connection with God? Singing praise to the Lord, sounding the joyful timbral and trumpet? Using the depth and mystery of liturgical words to carry your hopes to God, to ask for solace and help. Engaging with the myriad opportunities to watch and listen to worship on-line and broadcast? The wealth of recorded worship songs to enjoy playing? Or perhaps you love silent, wordless adoration and worship? Looking for and finding God in solitude, silence and the interior world of God in us, connecting with that mystery of unknown, known-ness?

3 - Receiving Gifts: Do you relate most deeply to God in creation and creator: the gifts of beauty in the natural world, the artist's vision, the thrill of getting caught up in that by participating in the creation of more? Are you uplifted

and most aware of God at work in you when you work on an artwork, or making music, gardening, cooking, sewing? Are you refreshed, alive and at peace in the process and long after?

4 - Acts of Service: Maybe you are the Good Samaritan who always is on hand offering help to friends, neighbours, and strangers? A person who feels deeply about injustices and social issues and actively tries to address them? A person who sees a discomfort, a difficulty and your heart and hands reach out immediately in response? And having helped in love, feel the glow of that love-response long after the deed is done.

5 - Physical Touch: I've translated this to Thinking Touch: those who love looking for and finding God in study. Do you delight in reading and learning more about God from the experiences others have recorded? The wisdom of the Saints, ancient and modern and the teachings of the Church Fathers? Testimonies and inspirations of contemporary Christians?

I wonder if you recognise any of these as your way of conversing with God's love? The way you express something that is bigger than you, and experience something that is from beyond you and yet connects with your most real self? The language of your communications with God's love?

I'm sure this is part of how the Holy Spirit operates within us: the Holy Spirit enables us to find more of who we are and who God is by inspiring us and prompting us to do that which we naturally love doing, even if its hard work at times.

One of the ways we tell if an action was prompted by the Holy Spirit is if it brings the Fruit of the Spirit in its wake, that lovely list of virtues like kindness, patience, humility, etc. When we are engaged in the work that is Spirit inspired, and Spirit-filled, we are, in its widest definition, praying because we are being open and attentive to God.

I wonder if what I have described is something you recognise? That feeling that the Holy Spirit is most alive and enlivening you when you are in your preferred mode of operating?

Sometimes its easier to work by elimination, by knowing what is not. If you often feel guilty because you 'ought' be more inclined to ... be active in the service of others and the work of social justice; or you 'ought' read and learn

more about faith; or spend more time in prayer; or feel inadequate because you don't enjoy gardening, and the arts particularly. If some of those feelings are familiar to you, maybe you are recognising God-Love Language styles that are not your preferred mode.

It is very easy for us to make assumptions about what a Good Christian, a Faithful Disciple, a Prayerful Person must be accomplished at and frequently 'Doing' and conclude that we are failing in part.

But why should we?

Are we all called to be numerate so we can be church treasurers? All called to be confident in liturgy so we can contribute to leading worship? Are we all called to be creative so we can beautify the church with flowers, catering and composing? We are different in how we love and find God; how we absorb and reflect God's love most readily. Different but all Spirit-filled, and together, we make One Body, baptised into One Spirit, and we rejoice in that!

Amen