Unity Through Diversity

As a language geek, I love the Pentecost story. I love learning foreign languages and constantly correct myself and others in grammar. I love the story of Pentecost because the Holy Spirit is manifested through disciples speaking different languages. As a language geek, I understand what it means to know a language or more than one. Learning a language is not only about a language because one’s language is an essential part of one’s culture. Learning a language means learning a culture, and the beginning of understanding the people of that culture.

This story of Pentecost is often compared to the story of the Tower of Babel because both stories involve the division of languages. In the Babel story, the division of languages was meant to divide the people to prevent them from uniting, getting more powerful from the union, and rebelling against God. On the other hand, the division of languages in the Pentecost story has an opposite meaning. It is meant to unite all God’s people, no matter one’s background. The first disciples spoke foreign languages that they did not know, which, to me, is an analogy of God’s people reaching out to understand each other and unite under Christ in all their diversities.
Unity through diversity is a holy paradox and the essence of being the people of Christ.

Pentecost is when the gospel story of God incarnate becomes personal to all disciples. Through the coming of the Holy Spirit, God in Christ becomes incarnate in ordinary believers. Through this event, God in Christ becomes available to all believers. The fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit was manifested through the celebration of diverse languages teaches us that diversity is a quintessential part of the Christian Church. This story teaches us that God celebrates all our different heritages (languages and cultures), and that we are all equally valued in God’s reign. It teaches us that we do not have to erase our identities to be God’s people one universal way. In my Pentecost reflection, I am reminded of the Melting Pot ideology of the American society and the people who says, “I don’t see colour”, which sounds nice at a first glance but is, in fact, oppressive. It demands minorities to erase who they are to blend in. According to what I learned from the Canadian and the United Church of Canada history, isn’t this what our forefathers and mothers tried to achieve? Didn’t they try to establish a unified nation by taking away the First Nations children from their communities and a “national” church through founding of the United Church of Canada? The Pentecost story claims that the Melting Pot is
wrong. We should not be a melting pot. Instead, we should be a salad, where all the ingredients are visible and in harmony.

Visible and in harmony may sound nice, but it is not an easy thing to achieve. We cannot become a salad unless we start to understand each other through learning about each other. That is why the Holy Spirit was manifested through the speaking of diverse languages. With this knowledge, we celebrate Asian Heritages during this month. We celebrate God with our different cultures and languages. Today, we are worshipping in different Asian languages. At the end of the service, you will receive a final blessing in different languages and feel like the crowd witnessing the first disciples speaking in different languages after receiving the Holy Spirit. We should celebrate God and our church families with the diverse gifts that we bring from our mother lands. Let us celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and praise God because, in the eyes of God, to quote a cosmetic company’s catch phrase, “we are worth it.” We give thanks to God for this extraordinary event that gave birth to the Christian Church (so happy birthday to us all). May the Holy Spirit be with you, you blessed and beloved people of God. Amen.