



REFLECTIONS

July 8, 2012

The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."

Genesis 11:6-7

A Common Language

To an outsider the sounds that resonated through the small sanctuary might have been garbled and indecipherable. Except for the music that accompanied them, they may have been described as meaningless noise. But the rhythm of familiar musical scores bound the small congregation into a unified body that touched our hearts.

The setting was a small Anglican church in a little town in Israel. Our small contingent of American tourists was welcomed with open arms by Palestinian Christians who invited us to join in their weekly worship. The service was conducted in their native language but graciously also in English. The liturgy read and the hymns sung were simultaneously expressed in our respective tongues.

Unless listening to one's self, the words from the hymns and the liturgical readings were drowned into unintelligible noise—except that the last utterance of the liturgy and the last lyric of the musical score ended in near perfect unity. It was then that we heard the true beauty of it all. We spoke different languages, but the same words; we spoke in different tongues but worshiped the same Lord; we came from different cultures but all were God's children,

As we sang the hymns and read the liturgy, the scene of the first Pentecost came to life.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. (Acts 2:4-7)

We were all struck by the worship service that day. We felt welcomed by the hospitality extended to us, comforted by the familiarity of the service, and encouraged by the youthful age of the congregants and the numbers of their children participating. With the thousands of miles that separate our homes and the cultural differences that can lead to political divide, our hearts were warmed to discover that in reality we were one people speaking a common language—the language of the good news of Jesus Christ.

And through that common language, we know that nothing is impossible.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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