

“lol”

The latest forms of print communication are interesting and causing a bit of a stir among language purists and English teachers. Of course, I'm referring to email, instant messaging, text messaging, twittering and the posts on Facebook, and such.

Some despise these methods of communication.

Some embrace and use them frequently with amazing finger dexterity, and others are indifferent or never use them.

.....And, I can tell who is who by the expressions are your faces.

True, vocabulary, proper grammar and spelling have taken a beating in the pursuit of rapid message exchanges. Instead of acquiring an expansive vocabulary which would render pellucid and laconic results, the users of these newer communication modes have opted to use abbreviations and chopped up phrases.

Proper spelling and grammar is no longer expected.

The cell phones will even finish words without typing all the letters. That's good and bad.

Regardless, how you feel about IM, text messages and email, there is nothing innately wrong with these modes.

They are a valid form of exchanging information, yet..... like any tool for communicating, they have limitations and drawbacks.

Just as smoke signals, stacking rocks and morse code were limited.

One person sent a text message to a friend that was suppose to say, “heading to work. IM you there.” IM means using the instant message mode. However, the cell phone took the M and made it into “meet”.

Since, grammar is not an issue, the other person read, “I meet you there”, and so she went to her friend's work place.

There are disadvantages to these new formats.

Most of us have learned the hard way, that humour and emotion laden messages don't translate well in email.

To assist with humour in email, people will add a smiley face, but don't even try to get emotional in email message. It doesn't work well.

Email and the other text type modes are usually fine for exchanging basic information, if written concisely, but avoid passion and emotion, unless you are very good with words.

It is proven that the brain works differently when typing compared to hand writing. One technique for helping students with ADHD is to allow them to type notes instead of hand writing them.

Hand writing seems to invite reflection and more personality to flow, yet all forms of print communication are limited. They are one dimensional.

Telephone does allow flavour to be added to words, without the burden of using additional adjectives. We can sense and feel more in the fluctuation and intonation of the voice during phone conversations, yet voice alone is also incomplete. Assumptions and misinterpretations can happen during a phone conversation.

Video cameras using programs such as Skype add the dimension of sight, and that is very helpful for better communication, but even so, a computer screen still is not the same as being in person—face to face while talking.

Being in person, face to face, is the ideal situation to enable good communication, but..... as we all know only too well, there can be problems and misunderstandings..... because successful communication is even more involved than being present with another..... just ask any parent of a teenager.

The brain of a teenager,..... as adults are keenly aware,... is not fully developed. The left and right brain don't interact very well—reason and emotion don't fully integrate. This is why safe driving is much more difficult for a teenager. Sometimes, emotions win out over prudent decisions. Also, when a parent is ranting and screaming at their teenage son for wrecking the car, the son gets really upset and annoyed.... because the mix of reason and emotion is confusing to him. The son is likely picking up on the anger and not hearing the message of the parents concern and advice. He's listening and thinking, "why are my parents, who are suppose to love me, so upset with me? I'm a nice person, and they are being mean" He's totally missing the point about their worry and lecture on responsibility.

*Parents: try not to stir in emotions with you want to get facts across.

Other things can inhibit successful communication, such as gender, language and culture.

Men and women use words differently. Men tend to be more precise with their words and try to speak after clarity of thought has arrived.

Women can think while they are talking and they like to spice things up with words, and are less concerned about exaggerating,..... a bit.

The language barrier is obvious. Two people who are face to face, but don't speak the same language will have a hard time communicating.

In addition, cultural influences are a huge factor, too.

When I was in Belarus, I translated, "That's really cool" into Russian, and they don't use that phrase. Blank stars were my response.

I've often been told that such and such phrase in low German doesn't translate into English. Idioms are cultural, as are attitudes.

Dima, my son-in-law, would get upset when he went to stores, after moving to America. He would grumble, "People are such liars here. That store clerk asked me how I was doing and told me to have a nice day. She doesn't even know me. Why is she pretending to be nice. That's dishonest!" I assure you, strangers in Belarus, including store clerks, are rude and disinterested in polite conversation, such as we would engage in.

Learning a language, including translating, requires learning about the culture, too.

An important part of preparing a sermon is properly exegeting the text, which includes researching the words in the culture when they were written to try to find the intended message and how it was understood. Next, that message needs to be translated for the context in which it is given.... in the hope that it will be received as intended,.... so long ago in a different time, language, situation and culture.

Sermons written 200 years ago, 100, 50, even 20 years ago will usually not work. People change; attitudes change, and situations change: all alter perception and understanding.

I should add, sermons are but one way to learn from the Bible. Personal reading and study is also very important, and a counting point with God.

There are other aspect that contribute to successful communication, such as body language, location and knowing the other person's history, including past interactions. In addition, successful communication thrives on repetition, active listening, patience, trust and desire.

So much is involved when we talk to another, and as you can see,.... it should NOT be surprising that we all have trouble communicating, and when communication fails, we can get in trouble, become deeply wounded or receive other pitfalls.

The likelihood of Success is greatly increased when all the helpful ingredients are present – all the necessary parts.

I think we all know this,.... or most of what I just shared, ..Yet,..... we still experience break downs / we still get stuck..... we still struggle with listening and being heard.

Broken, unsuccessful communication can be painful.

This failure sadly happens with parents and children, with good friends, with brothers and sisters,... and even with our partners.

All the elements / all the points of connection used together greatly increases the odds for success for interpersonal communication, yet one part I haven't mentioned, yet, and that one element is essential: Empathy.

Complete communication is very difficult,... without Empathy.

Empathy is like living the Golden Rule.
Empathy is reaching out and sensing and understanding the heart of another.
Empathy doesn't need words, yet relating / connecting requires empathy.
Moreover, a wholesome, healthy relationship needs empathy.

I think One of God's biggest challenges with humanity / one of God's biggest struggle is: How to communicate with us and how to implant into us empathy, so that we can learn, grow and enjoy wholesome / complete relationships.... with God, with creation and with each other.

I believe this is what Pentecost is all about.

God has presented numerous other connecting points for us.

We can pray: we talk to God and listen for God in prayer.
We have the Bible
We were given the prophets, wisdom and lessons for better living.
We have stories that invite us in for better understanding.
We have creation as a connecting point.
We have each other, and..... God gave humanity Jesus as a wonderful means to learn, grow and understand life and God.
Jesus lived for our salvation: our wholesome connection with God and all of creation.
Jesus presented many levels of relationship, yet.... a human form has its limitations, such as a person can only be in one place at one time.

More was required for understanding, for "right relationship", and I think ...accepting, embracing and believing Jesus' way and message is the key that opens the heart to receive God's Spirit.

RUAH... the spirit of God has always been around, yet we humans had trouble connecting / receiving the heart of God-God's love.

Jesus is the empathy.... the portal that invites love in-God's love.
God knows what it is like to be human: to cry, to laugh, to doubt and to die. God has empathy. God knows how to reach our heart with love.

And, to the those believers in Christ waiting in anticipation,... came what felt like a mighty wind, fire and more: They were filled with the giddy delight of joy – completeness / wholeness / unity.
WOW.

It shouldn't surprise us that the first response was understanding. They were able to communicate..... with anybody.

People spoke and they were heard and they understood.
All points were connected-wholeness / peace.
Finally, God and humans were fully united in God's creation, and there was wholeness/ atonement.

I don't believe this was a case of being "slain in the spirit" or overwhelmed by God, but rather the coming together of all the points / elements necessary for fully relating / connecting with God, including empathy. Jesus gave them insight into God's heart. They saw the passion and grace of God through Christ.

They knew Jesus, they knew the scriptures, and they were actively listening and waiting,..... and they received the connection— God in them, and I dare say, they in God.

Just as all the aspects of conversation greatly enhance the chances for successful communication, we need to embrace / we need to be in touch with all the points from God to heighten spiritual growth.

This includes prayer, learning the stories and Biblical lessons, being an healthy participant in creation, being in a faith community,and, to simplify it, it means being a follower of the way of Christ. And, that is our paradigm. Christ is our example.

Consider Jesus life and message:

Our wholeness / spiritual health / our salvation includes times of rest, prayer, worship, being in a community, doing service for others, doing justice, proclaiming and doing peace, being gracious, receiving nature, being bold and being humble, and on and on. Moreover, believing Jesus and following opens the door to better sense God's heart.

Exclude a few things and we are greatly limited.

And, to limit the connecting points to only a couple items, such as walks in nature, contemplation and prayer, as some do, and it would be like using text messaging to share a personal story.

No wonder so many people struggle with life / with being in a relationship with God.

No wonder there is so much despair and fear in the world.

Many people have limited their relationship with God to a few aspects... or none at all.

Broken communication / the absence of really connecting is truly lonely and scary.

To be sure, the essential aspect is empathy.

Doing all the right things / living an upright and pious life and affirming all the right things, are not enough.

We believe that God is loving and gracious, and that God gave us Jesus to better understand God's way and the journey to wholeness—salvation.

Yet, do we fully grasp God's passion, God's desire to be in a right relationship and to grant us wholeness in life? What is our level of empathy for God? Do we get empathy?

Empathy can patch in a lot of mis-connections in a conversation.

Empathy allows a person to assume the best, to reach for understanding and to patiently continue until there is wholeness in the message / the relationship. Empathy allows us to remember what a teenager feels.

Good theology and self discipline is not enough, just as listening skills and an impressive vocabulary will not insure complete communication.

God reaches out to everyone: to those who can't do abstract theology;
to those unable to tolerate the grey areas of life;
to those who are poor;
to those who are uneducated;
to those who can not delay gratification,
and to those who need a rescuer more than they then a role model.

We dare not be too smug with our polished religion that relies heavily on cognitive abilities and the wherewith all to balance being in pursuit of Christand our secular interests.
We dare not boast about our good theology.
Arrogance and prejudice is not conducive to good relationships.

We have the luxury to explore the finer aspects of theology, which is much like being a fluent speaker or having the latest smart phone.

Those things are truly helpful, yet without empathy..... we are NOT connecting well with each other, with creation or with God.

The historic Pentecost is when THEY got.
They actually got it..... and they received, in their soul, God's spirit.

We know how this is. I'm sure, all of us have had an intimate, tender moment with a person,.... when each other's spirit was felt united.

Include God and all of life, and that is the Pentecostal experience: the realization of wholeness / oneness..... of being with love.

The title of the sermon does not mean "laugh out loud" or "Lots of laughter." It means Lots of love.

Empathy requires LOVE.

God loved the world so much that God gave poured out self to us... and into us.... so that we would receive wholeness / redemption.... because God knew we needed Christ to fully put the pieces of life together.

That's empathy, and..... that is a lot of love.

God is love, and love enables empathy and much more, and love gives and unites.

And, that is only the beginning.

In the spirit of Pentecost, we must ask ourselves:

What are we doing to bring wholeness?

What are we doing to make the world a better place?

What are we doing to bring healing to broken relationships?

Responding to those questions requires empathy, and a lot of love.

I think we know where the love comes from.

But do we understand receiving means opening up our hearts for God and others to see?

In older church language that was called surrendering to Jesus.