

Good morning,

I recently read the book God's Smuggler which tells the story of a man called Brother Andrew. Andrew's story is set just after world war 2 and he had a rather dangerous job, he gave Bibles to people for free. There were some countries where it was practically illegal to be a Christian and to be caught with a Bible would have landed you in prison or even killed. Yet somehow, Brother Andrew was able to smuggle a vast quantity of Bible's into these countries without getting caught. One of the biggest challenges for Andrew was the language barrier, luckily enough Brother Andrew spoke 3 languages, English, German and his native language Dutch. It was hard enough finding a translator let alone one who wasn't on the government payroll and likely to hand him over to the authorities, so it was handy to be able to speak more than a single language.

How many people here can speak another language?

Ask for volunteers to give examples of the other languages they can speak. Back and forth with the congregation.

Brother Andrew found himself in Romania staying at a hotel with a suitcase full of Romanian Bibles.

Andrew woke very early to a bright and cheery day, anxious to join fellow Christians in this lovely garden of a land. The clerk in the hotel eyed him a little dubiously when he asked for a church. 'We don't have many of those, you know.' 'Besides, you couldn't understand the language,' he said. 'Didn't you know?' Andrew said, 'Christians speak a kind of universal language.' 'Oh. What's that?' 'It's called "agape".' 'Agape? I've never heard of it.'

'Too bad, it's the most beautiful language in the world.'

Andrew had been granted a meeting with the president of a church in Romania, The president greeted Andrew at the door and they made their way into the president's office, they both realised very quickly that neither one could speak any of the languages of the other. How were they going to communicate without a translator?

Andrew saw something. On the president's desk was a well worn Bible, the edges of the pages eaten back an eighth of an inch from constant turning. Andrew thought, what would happen, I wonder, if we were to converse with each other via the Scriptures?

And that is exactly what they did. Now I've had some volunteers who have kindly offered to have a conversation with each other in agape here today.

(Have verses printed out onto little numbered cards for volunteers to read back and forth across the pews.)

Person 1: 1 Corinthians 16:20 - All the brothers here send you greetings.

Person 2: Proverbs 25:25 - Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.

Person 1: Philemon 1:4 - I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers.

Person 2: Philemon 1:7 - Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

Person 1: Romans 13:2 - The night is nearly over, the day is almost here.

Person 2: 2 Corinthians 13:14 - May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Person 1: 2 Thessalonians 3:16 - Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

So

On the day of Pentecost nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus' disciples awaited the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus. When the Holy Spirit came down upon them, it did so like tongues of fire, and they all started praying in other languages for all to hear. This wasn't a trick of the ears, that the disciples spoke and everyone heard them in their own language, they were actually speaking in languages they had never been able to speak in before. How? Through agape, through love. God's love for all mankind was delivered that day by the Holy Spirit, so the disciples could tell everyone everywhere the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It can be difficult to communicate with other people sometimes, even more so if you don't speak the same language as them. It can be even more difficult if you don't speak at all. But you can speak in agape, in love, through your actions, to quote St Francis, preach the gospels

daily, use words where necessary. Something as simple as smiling at someone who's looking a bit sad or helping someone grab something off a high shelf if they are struggling to reach it or even a comforting hand on the shoulder, so long as the other person is in your bubble and general social distance is maintained, of course.

Your actions, like those of the apostles which defined who they were, define who you are, followers of Christ, spreaders of good news and spreaders of agape, of love.

That night, back in his hotel, the clerk called to Andrew. 'Say,' he said, 'I looked up that agape in the dictionary. There's no language by that name. That's just a Greek word for love.' 'That's it,' said Andrew. 'I've been speaking in it all afternoon.'