

## “Due tazze di tè.....”\*

It was during a summer break in the south of France a few years back, that Michelle and I borrowed a car and decided that a little drive to see my cousin in Milan was a really good idea. We packed up, headed off and, because we didn't have the girls, this kind of madness was perfectly OK! The drive out was stunning. The borrowed car didn't really enjoy the mountain passes, but we were having a brilliant time, the sun was shining, we had a picnic by a river, no worries, no problems.

Crossing the border was singularly uneventful; in fact we hardly knew that we'd changed countries, signposts were still in kilometres and we were still driving on the right hand side of the road. It wasn't until we stopped for a well-earned drink (the car had no air-con) that we suddenly became aware of a staggering oversight. We did not know one single word of Italian! I'm not exaggerating. To ask for a cup of tea (what self-respecting Englishman drinks a cold beverage in the scorching heat?) and a cake left us completely dumbfounded.

We were forced to resort to the classic 'point and grunt' approach to communication and when that failed, to point and grunt louder! Very ashamed, but successfully clutching a muffin and a drink, we continued on our way. It's a memory and a sensation that I will long remember and recite to you again and again, I'm sure. Why? Because communication is so crucial. Not to be able to speak even the basics was quite an experience.

So as God's people gathered to celebrate Pentecost, something incredible happened. God's Spirit enabled Jesus' disciples to speak in all kinds of languages to anyone and everyone who was present. It must have been incredible, but it was just the beginning. What saddens me a little is that, I believe, the Church in many ways has lost its multi-lingual gifts. There are may be a couple of linguists in the congregation who could manage a bit of Polish or Urdu, but that's not what I mean. Can we speak the changing language of culture?

The message of the Gospel which Peter was given on that day to preach to all around hasn't changed and God hasn't changed, but pretty much everything else has. God knew on that day that if He wanted to get His message out to the world, His people were going to need the language. Are we prepared to be equipped in the same way? Who's up for the gift of being able to speak to youth culture? Or business? Or to those whose life revolves around technology? Or poverty?

The way we frame the Gospel, God's good news, so often makes it, and God, look out of touch, out of date and uninteresting. I'm not saying this to lay guilt at anyone's door; it just happens. Suddenly, you realise you've crossed the border and the way you used to do things just doesn't make sense any more. We can either get back in the car and head home, or we can follow the disciples at Pentecost, allowing God to equip us and lead us in new ways.

I believe God's doing it already, but there is so much more to come. Some of us are engaged with, and speaking to, youth culture; some of us are looking at starting a food bank; some of us are looking at ways our buildings can be better equipped to meet today's needs; and some of us are fully engaged in caring for those around us.

I pray that this Pentecost, God would take hold of us in a new way and equip us with the new languages that we'll need for the journey ahead. However, I can't promise it'll be as relaxing as Milan was!

**Andy Hall**

\*Two cups of tea