

During my father's service in the Coast Guard, our family managed to move from one state to another, more than most people move in a lifetime. According to my mother's address book where she documented all of our addresses and my father's duty stations, I had nine addresses before I started kindergarten! Interestingly enough, our moves didn't involve moving up and down one coast or the other. That would be too easy. We seemed to move from coast to coast, back and forth. In the third grade, I was in Alaska. In the fourth and fifth grade, we lived in Maryland. In the sixth grade, we lived in California. You get the idea.

The positive side to all of this moving about was that I was able to see a great deal of this beautiful country firsthand. I have experienced the different climates between the north and the south. I have noticed the varied customs and behavior patterns between the east and the west. Some are friendly and welcoming. Some are definitely not. And even though we all attempt to speak the English language, I have heard innumerable dialects and accents from the different states and regions. Over these many years, I'm sure I have acquired bits and pieces of the various speech patterns to which I was exposed. If Henry Higgins were from America, he would have a field day with me!

I have lived in the southern states of Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. My friends from the northern states love to hear me talk on the phone just to hear my southern drawl. When I moved to the northern states, California more times than any other, I would eventually lose my accent, and pick up on the local words and slang of the area I was in. Soon, I would be the one laughing on the other end of the line while speaking with my old friends from the southern states. Because we moved so often, north, south, east and west, my speech doesn't seem to fit in anywhere! People from the south know I'm not home-grown, and people everywhere else have no idea where I come from!

Although America has always been considered a 'melting pot' for all of the countries of the world, English remains the dominant language. I have noticed many changes in the recent years, however, that show how we are becoming more diverse than ever. We can't help but notice the multilingual instructions that come with our purchases that require some assembly, and there are always at least Spanish and French translations on most of our household purchases like detergent and even dog food! I am really beginning to notice many more foreign conversations in places like the shopping mall and grocery stores.

Just think about how simple it must have been on this earth so long ago, when everyone was able to understand what the other was saying, before God confused the language at the Tower of Babel. I also wonder at times how we as Christians must sound to those who visit our churches. We do tend to speak our own language, confusing many who don't understand our theology, beliefs and ideas. For example, just the phrase, "to be born again", must be as confusing today as it was for Nicodemus when Jesus was trying to explain the term to him. It is always interesting when you speak to children about allowing "Jesus to come into their heart". Taken literally, that can be a very frightening thing!

For we Christians to tell others that they must be 'saved' in order to go to Heaven might sound arrogant to one who doesn't realize they have anything to be saved from! And I do understand when I hear non-believers express their discomfort with how we casually announce that we have been "washed by the blood of Jesus." Again, taken literally, it sounds gross.

Even though we know the true joy of becoming a new person in Christ, and are set free by our salvation because we asked Jesus to come into our heart, and by being covered by His blood our sins are washed away, we need to be cautious and aware of the people around us who may not understand. Let's just love them, as Jesus would. After all, God's love is the same in every language.