

**Sermon Notes for 5/15/16 (Pentecost Sunday)**

**Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN**

**Text: Acts 2:1-21**

**Theme: BABEL'S BROKEN BABBLING BONDED BY BUOYANT BROADCAST**

**Hymn: LBW 523 (Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling)**

**The Point:** In His unifying actions at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit reverses the curse of Babel and focuses every tongue on communication of the life-changing, life-saving Good News in Jesus the Messiah.

**Introduction:** Pentecost has a long history. For one thing, the celebration of Pentecost had been taking place in Israel for hundreds and hundreds of years before the time of Jesus. But there is something else even more ancient that we need to consider. The reading from Genesis unfolded the story of the tower of Babel for us. At that early stage of human history, the residents of earth occupied the area known as the Fertile Crescent. The Akkadian word for “Gate of God” is *babilu*. The Hebrew word *balal* means “to mix” or “to confuse.” Theologically, the significance of Babel is that here the pride of man had reached its zenith. The tower (*ziggurat* is the name closer to the original) was built as a monument to the pride and arrogance of its builders.

Scripture says, “Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’” In direct opposition to the command of God given to Adam and Eve that they should “fill the earth and subdue it,” these wiseacres thought they would center all of their efforts in one place, where they would build something that reached to heaven.

One New Year’s Day, in the Tournament of Roses parade, a beautiful float suddenly sputtered and quit. It was out of gas. The whole parade was held up until someone could get a can of gas to rescue this hungry engine. The amusing thing was this float represented the Standard Oil Company. Despite its vast oil resources, its truck was out of gas. Power that is wasted is a sad thing. That was the case with the inhabitants of the area around this tower of Babel.

Their power and might did not amaze God. God, we are told, “came down to see the city.” Apparently they had not reached quite to heaven – a bit of irony or sarcasm here. The ambitions of man had reached His ears, and He was determined to put an end to this little attempt to get to heaven on their own. So God said, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” Imagine how difficult it would be to communicate to someone who spoke only Russian that you needed a piece of 2x4 rounded on the end in a length of 24<sup>3/8</sup>”. Or how would you get across to a person who had only Hebrew as their tongue just how to make a balustrade for the stairway up to the attic? So the whole project had to be abandoned, and the scattering that people refused to do on their own in obedience to the Lord was accomplished by God’s confusing of their tongues. BABEL’S BROKEN BABBLING!

Such a scattering was an act of judgment on man’s pride and rebellious spirit. But God was not done with man at that point. His ultimate purpose in dealing with mankind was to build a united and harmonious assembly of people who would share a common purpose, a common direction, and a common identity all wrapped up in their relationship with God. It was not to make them clones of one another, nor to suppress all signs of individuality. But His purpose is to bring people together in the united confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah, an action which Jesus Himself equated to “knowing God.” When we see Jesus, we see the Father, and as we trust in Him we are brought into unity with God. That is the point behind Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” At home with God in union with Jesus Christ – this is our ultimate goal.

In order to accomplish this, God has carried out His salvation plan in the giving of His Son. Through the coming of Jesus into flesh, God has identified fully with His human creatures. Jesus did not come as a dolphin or as an eagle or as a lion. He came into the world as 100% human. If it were not enough that God had crowned creation with the arrival of mankind, made in his image, God takes shape as a man in order to let us know just how high we rank in His heart and mind. Creation and redemption both affirm your uniqueness in God's plan for this world.

And Pentecost is God's way of undoing what took place at the Tower of Babel. It starts with the gathered disciples. We are told in Acts 1 that this group "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer." They lived with the promise of Christ (spoken to them during those forty days after His resurrection) that "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Prayer is the starting point for every meaningful revival or reformation that has taken place among human beings.

In the late nineteenth century, five young college students spent a Sunday in London, and were anxious to hear some well-known preachers. They found their way on a hot Sunday to Spurgeon's Tabernacle. While they were waiting for the doors to open, a stranger came up to them and said, "Gentlemen, would you like to see the heating apparatus of this church?" They were not particularly anxious to do so on a broiling day in July, but they consented. They were taken down some steps and a door was thrown open. Then their guide whispered, "There, Sirs, is our heating apparatus." Looking in, they saw some 700 souls bowed in prayer seeking God's blessing on the service about to be held in the tabernacle above. Their unknown guide was C. H. Spurgeon himself. He knew where the power lay – and it was not with him, gifted and eloquent though he may have been. The power is found only in the working of the Holy Spirit.

So on that Pentecost Day that we commemorate today, the Spirit's presence was shown palpably to those gathered. The sound of a mighty wind filled the house. In Hebrew the word for wind is *ruach*. In Hebrew the word for Spirit is *ruach*. In Greek the word for wind is *pneuma*, and the word for Spirit is *pneuma*. No wonder when they heard a rushing wind, they had "Spirit" on their minds. And there were the tongues of fire that separated and sat on the head of each disciple. Fire, too, had long been associated with the coming of the Spirit. John the Baptizer's words must have rung in their ears, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

While they begin to understand that the Spirit is at work here through these powerful signs, yet another sign strikes their senses. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Suddenly here is James speaking in Parthian and John in the language of Mesopotamia and Philip in Macedonian and Andrew in Arabic – well, you get the message. And the people who were there got the message. In fact, the same message was being proclaimed by each of the disciples in terms that struck to the hearts of the hearers. Each of them was pointing the hearers to the power and grace of the God who was at work in His Word and by His Spirit, drawing people to Himself.

It was a bit of a chaotic scene at first – to the point that some of the crowd accused the disciples of being drunk. The other day I was in the elevator at the Minnesota Health Orthopaedics Clinic. Two women entered the elevator. They were dressed in the typical burkas that you may see in lots of places around the Twin Cities. Their speech was rapid-fire and animated, and I didn't catch a word of it. For all I knew, they were babbling insensibly. But they seemed to understand one another perfectly. Face it, when you hear another language, you are baffled, and it may lead you to some unhealthy conclusions – on this occasion, that the apostles had been hitting the wine a bit heavily.

At that point, Peter takes the stage and addresses the crowd. We can imagine that his words are being translated by the other disciples for the sake of those in the crowd who know the tongue they are enabled

to speak. He took issue with the accusation of drunkenness, reminding the group that it was only 9 in the morning. But the seemingly chaotic speaking that was going on was not chaotic at all, but focused on one thing, namely the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the pouring out of God's Spirit on all people. "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." That very thing was being demonstrated in their midst. The Lord's day had begun. The day of salvation was at hand. The last days were initiated.

Not only was this the outpouring of the Spirit, but it was the linchpin for salvation: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." This is the culmination of Joel's prophecy, and it is the culmination of Peter's message. He will go on to speak specifically of how the Lord has been at work in the life and death of Jesus, God's only-begotten Son. He will especially lift up the reality of Christ's resurrection from the grave, which is now empty.

But the final point is that this salvation is open and available to all people, whatever their language or tongue or people group or nation. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That emphasis was important, since gathered in Jerusalem on that day were "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." Not a one was exempted from the promise. The door to heaven's glory was thrown open to all. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Peter would fill out for them a bit later in the message just what this calling on the name of the Lord involved specifically. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Some three thousand would respond on that very day to this priceless message of salvation embodied in the forgiveness that Jesus won at the cross. They would be baptized into the life of Jesus and into the name of Jesus. And from there, the Church would explode in growth across the face of the whole earth.

This is what the Spirit is about in the world, connecting people to the promise of life and forgiveness in Jesus. One man (Flavel) has put it this way: "As the blood of Christ is the fountain of all merit, so the Holy Spirit is the fountain of all spiritual life; and until He quickens us, imparts the principle of divine life to our souls, we can put forth no vital act of faith to lay hold upon Jesus Christ." It took the working of the Holy Spirit that day through the proclamation of the Gospel for all those people to pass through the waters of baptism and to start a new era in the history of the people of God. And that same Spirit is present here today, through the proclamation of the Gospel, through the taste of Christ's body and blood in bread and wine, through the assurance of your forgiveness, to draw each and every one of you into an eternal bond with Jesus the Messiah.

What this Pentecost event means is summed up by John Hall in this brief overview: "Culture is good; genius is brilliant; civilization is a blessing; education is a great privilege; but we may be educated villains. The thing that we need most of all is the precious gift of the Holy Spirit." BABEL'S BROKEN BABBLING is indeed BONDED BY the BUOYANT BROADCAST of salvation through faith in the Messiah given by God and exalted by God's Spirit.

**Conclusion:** In His unifying actions at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit reverses the curse of Babel and focuses every tongue on communication of the life-changing, life-saving Good News in Jesus the Messiah. The confused and multiplied tongues that were a judgment on early mankind and their desire to live by their own plans now find a new focus. "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" the Pentecost crowd exclaims. And we have our voices joined with theirs this day in praise of the God who does great wonders and in exaltation of the Savior Jesus, whose death and resurrection are the final hope and the ultimate joy of all humankind. May our tongues always be ready to speak in thanksgiving of our

Lord's salvation! And may our hearts always remember that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," so that we readily extend the invitation to every tongue around us to come to Jesus and to know life! In His gracious name, AMEN!