



“Spirit Speak”

Day of Pentecost
8:30 and 10:45 a.m. Sunday, May 15, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Did you happen to catch the way our two lessons tie together this morning? We began with the story of Babel. No, we're not talking about the fish from *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I mean the place, the city.

Humanity has survived the flood. We've started over. But apparently, due to that old adage of “there's safety in numbers,” human beings have all pretty much stuck together. They're gathered in one place, and they all speak the same language. Remarkably, they're all getting along. So they decide to undertake a capital improvement project: they want to build a city. And in addition to a safe place to *live* together, the good people decide they should put a tower into the plan as well.

I have to interject that it is often interpreted as that the people wanted to build a tower up to God. but our passage doesn't say anything about humans attempting to make themselves equal with God, only that they wanted to build *a tower with its top in the heavens*

So they begin to build. And evidently they're pretty good at this. they're ripping along, making the bricks, growing the city, erecting the tower. And things go well. So well, in fact, that Lord God comes to have a look.

And here's where things get a little fuzzy. Because the Lord God sees what humans have done, and seems to be impressed with the results, and realizes that, as long as they get can communicate easily with one another, they're pretty much going to keep doing just that: staying put, doing stuff Right There. And that is **not** what the Good Lord intended with that whole “Go forth and multiply” advice that Noah and the gang received back in Chapter Nine.

God comes up with a simple plan: give the people different language. Make it so they cannot easily understand one another. Encourage them to go off with others who speak as they do, to communicate with those who sound like them.

So what was a single example of what humans might be capable of working together, becomes the symbol of humanity's quest to spread out across the planet.

Compare that dispersion to what transpires in Acts 2. First, a quick recap leading up to Chapter 2. Jesus was this teacher, leader, and spiritual figure. He gets set up by the religious

bureaucrats, railroaded through the justice system, and unfairly sentenced to death. He's executed, but, Surprise! He doesn't **stay** dead, because he happens to be who he says he is; that is, God. After his resurrection, Jesus stays with his people for forty days, doing some more teaching, making certain everything is to be okay; then he does this ascension thing into heaven.

This is where our lesson picks up. **Ten days** after that ascension thing (so *fifty* days after the resurrection) (*fifty*, as in *pente*, five), as the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem, (apparently in the same room that they've been hanging out in ever since that Passover meal, before everything hit the fan), they hear a loud wind come roaring through (it was apparently very localized, as in, just in that building, just in that room). They look around at each other, and see what looks like **flames** coming out of the tops of each other's heads (and not in a *Ghost Rider* kind of way). They begin to talk to each other, I'm guessing asking something along the lines of "Did you hear that?" "What's going on?" "What have you got on your head?" "Hey! You're not speaking Aramaic!"

To the people who gather out in the streets (remember, folks are gathering in Jerusalem for the Celebration of the Booths, one of the three major Jewish holy days. They're there from all over the Roman Empire, but since this is *Jerusalem*, those folks are primarily Jewish in ethnicity) and all those people are amazed that they're hearing this small group of people all talking in various and sundry languages.

Naturally, the first conclusion is that these folks are drunk. Because, you know, it's 9AM. Yeah, sure, of course they're drunk (that was sarcasm, by way, just to make sure you got it). Here's the thing: They really **are** speaking in any one of the fifteen or so languages that are named off, so the listeners claim:

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs,

which, assuming your ancient Middle East and Roman Empire mental map isn't quite up to speed, means that we're talking about the modern countries of Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Israel, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Italy, Greek, and Saudi Arabia. In other words, basically the **entire known world** to a first century resident of Jerusalem.

But Peter - *Peter* of all people - Peter, this guy who is always the over-enthusiastic Labrador of the disciples; Peter, who vehemently, voraciously, **denied** knowing Jesus when Jesus needed a friend the most - *Peter* stands up to the crowd and begins to talk. Blessed by the Spirit, Peter gives witness to the crowd of the *amazing* Love that is Christ Jesus. And I can only imagine that while he's speaking, some of the other apostles are in the background, translating what Peter's saying into whatever language it is that they now speak, I am guessing, **in addition to** Aramaic.

Because what happened here isn't *glossolalia*, that is, speaking in tongues (most of us Lutherans don't do that). What's happening with the apostles isn't speaking in the language of the angels (which, by the way, scripture says that if someone **is** doing that, there **has to be** an interpreter there, or the person speaking should be quiet). The apostles

are conversing in *human speech*.

It's kind of cool, isn't it? There were people from *all around* the known world, who could suddenly understand these edge of the empire fishermen, day laborers, and tax collectors, some of whom probably had the equivalent of maybe a sixth grade education, while others were probably fairly astute. Regardless, in all likelihood, none of these guys would be likely to have the ability to of *xenologia*. That's our big word of the day here. It means speaking in a language not one's own.

But you know *what else* this is? This is the **Spirit at work**. This is the Spirit speaking to all of humanity, in one voice. This is Babel being reversed. This is humanity, now being able to converse with one another. But converse about the most important thing: faith; God's grace, and love, and forgiveness.

Therein lies the greatest miracle: diverse human beings, coming together. The question then becomes: is this a miracle we can replicate, today? Is this something that we, as believers, are willing to strive for? Or are we content to live in a post-Babel age? Can we put aside post-Babel differences: languages, culture, skin tone, food, political candidates, whatever it is that divides us?

Are we willing to learn to work together, to help those in need, to spread the gospel, to comfort the afflicted and feed the hungry and house the homeless, no matter what language they speak, or religion they practice? Are we comfortable being Babelites? Separated? Alone? Afraid?

Or are we willing to become Pentecost people, filled with the Spirit, serving Christ in all we do?

Amen.

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