

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
May 23, 2010
Pentecost Sunday**

Genesis 11:1-9

Pentecost Ended the Babble at Babel!

1. *The Lord puts an end to selfish speech*
2. *The Spirit unites people of all languages by faith in Jesus*

Hymns: 184 – 176 - 183

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Genesis 11:1-9 –

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 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 and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Do you know any foreign languages? I have a few languages that we can look at today on the screen up front. Perhaps you can see how many you know:

- **Car Dieu a Tellement aime le monde, qu'il a donne' son Fils unique, afin que quiconque eroit en lui ne perisse point, mais qu'il ait la vie eternelle.**

- **Taimik Gudib sillaksoarmiut naegligiveit, Ernetuane tunniluge, illunatik okpertut tapsomunga, assiokonnagit nungusuitomigle innogutekarkovlugit.**
- **Porque de tal manera amo Dios al mundo, que ha dado a su Hijo Unigenito, para que todo aquel que en el cree, no se pierda, mas tenga vida eterna.**

Maybe you have an idea what those languages are? The first language is French, the second is Eskimo, and the third is Spanish! These may seem difficult, but we could have looked at some languages that have letters that are not even the same as ours and might look even stranger to us!

Language is a divider, isn't it? Someone estimated that there are about 5,000 languages in the world. Why are there so many languages, and how did they develop? Today in God's Word, we see the origin of the many languages of the world. We'll learn that it wasn't always that way, and we'll find out why.

1 – We read in Genesis 11, “*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.*” We need to understand the background here. To do this, it may help you to look on a map. This account is one of the first after the worldwide Flood at the time of Noah. After the Flood, Genesis 9 tells us, “*God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.’*” God wanted them to fill the earth again. Genesis 11 tells us that people migrated from the Mr. Ararat area to the east part of the Fertile Crescent. This area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is modern day Iraq.

At a plain called Shinar, they stopped. We don't know the exact location of this plain called Shinar, but the names Babel and Babylon give us clues to its general location. As they stopped here, we read, “*They said to each other, ‘Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.*

Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens.' ” They stopped the migration at this plain called Shinar and began to build. Note also that these individuals have some intelligence in the way they go about building. Some people like to picture early mankind as quite primitive and “undeveloped.” This is not the way the Bible pictures early civilization!

What was wrong with doing this? Why would God be displeased with them? We see the sin in the reason for their building project: “*Let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves.*” There is the problem. Did you see all the pronouns in their sentence? “Let us build ourselves a city... so that we may make a name for ourselves.” In making a name for themselves, they intended to take all the glory of accomplishment for themselves. It was a selfish project, a project of sinful pride.

We also hear them saying, “*...and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.*” Here is another major attitude problem. They did not want to follow what God had instructed them to do! By using these words, which were similar to God’s command in chapter 9, we suspect that this sin was committed knowing full well what God’s will was. They were rebelling against his instructions. Their rallying point would be the tower they would build. It would be a project that would unite them and bring glory to them. We don’t know exactly what this tower looked like. Many people picture it as a pyramid-type ziggurat that was commonly built in those days. It was to be their Washington Monument, their Eiffel Tower, their Leaning Tower of Pisa, which would bring them glory and unity.

This is HUMANISM at its ugliest! The refrain for their national anthem could have been, “Glory to man in the highest!” For them, man would be the measure of all things.

But then the Lord stepped in. We read, “*The LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come,*

let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.' So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel - because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.” We could say that the Lord made a “babble” out of Babel. He caused their languages to be different from one other. This brought the building project to a complete standstill.

Some of you here today may have undertaken building a house or helped with the building of our church. You have seen the challenges of a building project. In simply having a home built, many people can be involved in the different areas: Electrical, plumbing, carpentry, painting, flooring. Confusion and misunderstandings can crop up. In fact, I’ve heard that when some people build their home, they come every evening to check out the work and make sure there are no mix-ups! A building project is difficult enough when everyone speaks English. Can you imagine this group trying to complete this project when they couldn’t communicate? To make matters worse, there was most likely an air of mistrust created by the language barriers. Differences in language can cause that. Therefore, the building project was abandoned, and people of similar languages spread out together over the face of the earth.

What would happen to their monument now? It would be an unfinished monument to the shame of humanism! “*Do not be deceived; God is not mocked,*” the NT book of Galatians tells us. **The Lord puts an end to selfish speech.**

Rather than look at the languages of the world as a result of the ingenuity of mankind, we see that it is due to the rebellion and sin of mankind. Martin Luther called this act of the Lord a more horrible judgment than the Flood. His reasoning was that the Flood affected one generation of people. Consider that all generations that would follow the Tower of Babel would struggle with the confusion and mistrust that various languages would cause. Consider how world missions is different today because of God’s judgment at Babel!

2 – With that in mind, let’s flash forward to the story of Pentecost, which was in our first Scripture reading. We see an interesting connection to this story of rebellion from Genesis.

Pentecost means “fifty.” It was the fiftieth day after Jesus rose from the dead, ten days after he had ascended into heaven. He had told his disciples that he was going to send them the “Counselor,” the Holy Spirit, to help them in their work of spreading God’s Word to the ends of the earth. The disciples, Acts 2 tells us, were gathered together in a room. The special outpouring of the Holy Spirit happened on Pentecost Day about 9:00 a.m. The sound of a wind was heard; tongues of fire rested on the heads of the disciples; and they began to speak in tongues.

“Tongues” is the same Greek word for “languages,” which was the point of difficulty for the builders of the Tower of Babel. We read about these tongues at Pentecost: *“(The disciples) began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ ”*

The tongue-speaking floored the visitors to Jerusalem who heard this! These disciples were speaking in languages they had not learned. In these many tongues they declared the “wonders of God,” the salvation that the Lord worked out for us sinners by our Savior Jesus, who died on the cross for the sin of the world and rose victoriously on Easter Sunday. The grace of God had mixed the world’s languages to set the stage so the Savior could still come!

The interesting thing about Pentecost in Jerusalem is that the many languages were united now in a special way. We could almost call it “Babel in reverse”! The division and differences created at Babel were used to proclaim a united message: Jesus is the Savior of the world! After all, no matter what language you speak, there still is only one Savior and one way to heaven. Peter would later say in Acts 4, *“There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* No matter what language is native to you! Ephesians 4, speaking about faith and the family of God, says, *“There is one body and one Spirit —just as you were called to one hope when you were called —one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”* Believers are united by faith in Jesus as their Savior!

In saying this, we can’t forget the many passages of Scripture which emphasize the importance of speaking against false teachings in the Christian church and avoiding those who promote them. Over the course of the last 2000 years, the devil has had a lot of time to introduce just about any false teaching imaginable. But the fact remains that **one faith, faith in Jesus as Savior, is the only way that any language can proclaim the truth of God that needs to be believed for salvation!**

What was the result of this miracle at Pentecost? After this, the disciples went to the world in its many languages and took the one message that is vital for salvation: Jesus is the Savior. **People of many cultures and languages would hear this one message preached. Pentecost ended the babble at Babel!**

On this Pentecost Day, what can we learn from these two accounts that we’ve heard about today? After all, this is more than just a history lesson in our sermon. We can learn a basic truth from each of these stories for our life of faith. First, what do we learn from the Tower of Babel? There is a trap that we need to avoid – HUMANISM!

We need to remember some things about ourselves as individuals:

- We need to keep a proper perspective of who we are. We are mortal. Our fame and

reputation is not lasting, but will fade away.

I saw an illustration of this lately. I saw that there was an auction a few years ago in which the belongings of Johnny Cash and his wife were sold. Up for sale were:

- More than 50 instruments played by the couple
- Cash's suede fringe jacket
- His long leather coat made especially for him, valued at \$8000
- His boots
- His hats
- His shirts
- A 1950's notebook full of his handwritten lyrics
- Photographs
- Letters
- Furniture
- Art
- Jewelry
- Even Cash's 2002 black Ford pickup!

What do you think when you hear that? It's pretty sad. It's also a reminder that no matter how famous we are, or how talented we are, we will all pass from this earth if time allows, and our memory will begin to fade away.

- We need to abandon all hope of being able to save ourselves, confess our sins to our God, and realize that he is our only hope of heaven through Jesus. This is a different message than many graduation addresses that may be proclaimed in our country this time of year!
- If there is a command we don't care for in God's Word for some reason, we don't throw off God's rule and say, "I'm making my own rules!" Rather, we submit to what he says as our Creator and Savior.
- In the plans that we make for our life, we always include God. Don't get so caught up in the details of the rat race that you forget the spiritual. Don't let any detail (work, pleasure, or building your dream home) keep you from God's house.

We also need to keep this in mind as a church. We would never base what we do or our future on externals, such as our building. The temptation exists after a building project that has produced an attractive building to rest on your laurels and think you have it made. Are we done building? The truth is that we function as an Emergency Room, not a tower to our glory. We do nothing with the motivation of sinful pride to further our reputation, but all we do is for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

What do we learn from Pentecost Day? That's not a hard lesson. We heard that the many languages that day heard about the one faith needed for salvation. We need to take the Word to the world. Our community needs to hear it. Our Korean Church needs to have our support as they take the Word to those who need to hear it. We have a synod we can support that trains missionaries to go places we won't be going and learn languages that we won't be learning so they can spread the gospel. **We need to do all we can personally and as a church to spread the message of salvation in the world.**

An added bonus today is that we see the power of the Holy Spirit who is on our side. What a needed and valuable power this is! He will be with us as we spread this message!

Finally, there was something similar among all those languages that we saw at the beginning of this message. All the words you saw are the same translation: "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*"

God has a united message that can be said in any language. And one day many nationalities will proclaim this together in heaven, in some language or another (probably not English?). Until then, let's use language wisely, proclaiming Jesus as our Lord! And may the Holy Spirit bless us as we do! Amen.