

*The Day of Pentecost – The Coming of the Holy Spirit*

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Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

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. (NIV)*

"Glory to me in the highest!" Did I just say that out loud? Yet this is the actual truth far too often in my thoughts. I want glory for myself. Too many times I want to be praised. This truth is also found in my words. I will say things that try to make me look good, things that try to bring glory to myself. Time and time again my actions also reveal that I am the center of my universe. So sadly even if I do not say it out loud the truth all too often has been: "*Glory to me in the highest!*"

Would you not have to confess the same thing? Do you not want at least a little bit of the glory? Would you not welcome a portion of the praise? Don't you also at times find your thoughts, words, and actions being self-centered? Don't you find this same sinful attitude and same kind of selfish sins in your life? The devil does not need to get us to bow down to false gods to commit idolatry. All he needs to do is get us to look in the mirror and think: "*Glory to me in the highest!*"

This is why, my dear friends in Jesus, I pray for a rich measure of the Holy Spirit to fill each one of us today. May the Holy Spirit work through this Word of truth before us to create in us pure hearts! **For this is no babel: All glory belongs to the Lord our God! The Lord acts in judgment. The Lord acts in mercy.**

The time period here is estimated to be at the very least 100 years after the worldwide flood. God had commanded the people to scatter throughout the world – to fill the earth. It was God's good will that the earth be filled with people - people who will live for His glory. We are told: "*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.*" These descendants of Noah started to spread out as God commanded. We read that they moved eastward (really more southeast) until they found a plain in Shinar. This well-watered plain down the line from the Tigris-Euphrates valley looked like a perfect place to settle. In fact, the people thought "*how can it get any better than this,*" so against God's command they decide to stay here.

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***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.***" We see several things here. First, these were not some Neanderthal cavemen as some like to picture ancient people. They were highly intelligent, motivated people with skills like people of today. Second, what they were planning to build was a permanent structure. The materials they decide to use are ones that will last. They decide to work together to make a city and a tower that reaches into the heavens – a true skyscraper. Finally, they directly rebel against God's command and reveal their true intentions: "***so that we may make a name for ourselves.***" Instead of "*glory to God in the highest*" it was "*glory to me in the highest.*"

The Lord saw it all! And God will not share His glory with another or His praise with idols. We read: "***But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.***" We understand the Lord did not actually have to come down to see what was going on. God knows and sees all, but the Bible at times uses human terms or actions for God to help us understand Him and His ways. There is also a bit of irony here that this tower that the people think is so great, so tall, and so impressive is something so tiny, so puny, and so insignificant that the Lord has to come down to see it. Doesn't this also put all of what we perceive to be our great accomplishments into perspective? We need the constant reminder: "***All men are like grass and all their glory like the flowers of the field, the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever***" (1 Peter 1).

All glory belongs to the Lord our God and the people had forgotten this and showed it by their sinful actions. ***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.... That is why it was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world."*** Our (three-in-one) Triune God acts in judgment here. The Lord puts a quick end to their building project and settlement plans. He confuses them so they can't understand each other. No longer could they communicate to work together. This also led to distrust in each other.

This explains why there are more than 5000 different languages in the world today. This is not due to the cleverness of the human mind as some have claimed. Instead, it was the result of rebellious sinful hearts. It was the Lord's judgment. Martin Luther even called the judgment of God here at Babel a worse judgment than the flood. For he explains that judgment only wiped out a single generation of humanity, but this divine judgment at Babel has caused confusion, and hatred, and suspicion, and discord in every generation since. The Lord acts in judgment. I pray we remember that it is never about making a name for ourselves in this world. God deserves all the glory and all the praise for everything we have comes from Him. We shall have no other gods and when we do we deserve God's judgment. I pray we recognize our sins of idolatry and repent of them. It is no babel: all glory belongs to the Lord our God.

Yet, all glory and praise belong to our God not just because He is a holy God who acts in judgment on sinful people. God's actions here were much more than just an act of judgment. It was an act of mercy. Notice the name for God used here - the God who confused the people. It was the LORD – the name used for the Savior God, the God of free and faithful love – the God who keeps His promises. These descendants of Noah

were running away from God and His promises. They were deliberately disobeying the Lord. The Lord could have very well said, *“All right! If you want to go to hell so badly have it your way! See if I care? Go ahead and make yourselves your own gods!”*

But this is not what the God of grace said or did. Instead, the Lord intervenes. He did not want the history of mankind to end in heathenism. Nor was God about to let the people wipe their feet on His good plan for the world. So the Lord acted in mercy so that His will was done. ***“So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city...From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”*** The Lord acted in mercy because He had much bigger plans for the people of this world. He wanted once again to be their God and for them to be His people. He wants it so much He sends His Son.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof of God’s mercy. He is the basis for all God’s gracious dealings with sinners and is the extreme evidence of His love. Jesus never made it all about Himself. He never had a selfish thought, never spoke a self-glorifying word, and never committed a single, sinful, self-centered action. This is the righteousness Jesus gave to you at your baptism. For Jesus did not come to earth to make a name for Himself, but He came so that our names could be written in the Book of Life in heaven. Jesus did this by taking on Himself all our selfishness, all our idolatry, all our sin. All of it was with Him on the cross. Jesus suffered the full penalty for those sins. The Lord in judgment punished His Son and at the same time the Lord in mercy allowed His Son to die for us that we might live.

And now we watch as God’s plan for the world has been coming together ever since. For the people of this world, confused at the tower of Babel, have been once again brought together through a common language – the gospel. The good news about Jesus brings people from every tribe, language and people back into one family. The good news that Jesus died for our sins and was raised to life because God accepted the sacrifice Jesus made in our place unites people throughout the world. What an example we have here on Pentecost! The Holy Spirit works to bring us back to all speak one common language – the language of God’s amazing love for sinners. This is no babel – all glory belongs to the Lord our God.

Not even a little bit of the glory belongs to me! Haven’t you had reminders of this in your life? I know I have. It may not be as evident as here at the tower of Babel, but the Lord intervenes in our lives to remind us it is not a very good idea to become our own god. We need Him – for everything. Only the Lord saves. Only He judges all and only He is able to give us the mercy and forgiveness we need. The confusion is over – Jesus is my Savior and your Savior. *“Glory to God in the highest!”* Now that is something it feels good to say out loud! Amen.