

June 9, 2019 (Pentecost)

Genesis 11:1-9

Acts 2: 1-13

Love 301: "One and Many"

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

It all began with a dog named Todd who barked so much the neighbors complained. A lot. The landlord took action and Molly and John Chester were given a choice: the dog or the apartment.

They chose the dog. A dog who when at the time they got him from a shelter, they promised they would never abandon him like he had been abandoned before.

Which then caused them to decide to actually do what they had been dreaming about. In 2011, they quit their jobs as a chef and filmmaker in L.A. and bought 200 acres of a former mono crop farm, which was only surrounded by other mono crop farms in Ventura County. There they threw everything they had into starting not just a farm, but one that functioned in perfect harmony with nature by using "biomimicry" and "regenerative soil methods". In other words, a Garden of Eden: 76 varieties of fruit trees, 30-plus beehives, a restored pond home to dozens of wild bird species, and an Old McDonald-level collection of livestock including pigs, cows, chickens, and sheep.

According to Genesis, there was once a group of people who were like a mono crop who were all alike, who were surrounded by others who were mono "cropish" as well. And God thought that sounded like a good idea, along the same lines as Monsanto! Then, homogeneity led to a massive building project whose sole purpose was to show their

supremacy and superiority, which they thought would lead to their dominance.

Then, God saw that all this, would not lead to any place that's good. And so, God mixed things up. And so, we have it then – God's judgment on the dominance of one people, with one language, whose wish to make a name for themselves took over their lives.

God saved them by confusing their language, so they could not complete their domination project. God defused their homogeneity and hegemony and scattered them like hot ashes, so their ambitious fire would not spread.

God decided it would be good for them and us to stop taking our communication for granted and work a little harder at trying to understand each other.

The damage done at Babel is undone by the power of the Holy Spirit – but only for a single morning. Once the fire had cleared and the wind had died down, they faced the same challenges that everyone else did – trying to understand and making themselves understood.

Molly Chester said this about her diverse farm, "I think I came in with the naivety that if you're leaning forward and giving something your all, it's just going to go your way. I had to learn that weathering the storm is part of the process." And they did weather five fires and fierce winds and that was just the weather they had to contend with, not to mention the pests and predators.

Have we given up on the work that will always come with diversity? Is it just too hard, requiring too much effort and so much time with what then appears to be slow progress, if at all, often looking like it has always been! Or are we willing to

continue opening our ears, minds, hearts, hands, and limiting how often we open our mouths?

Sameness was the abandoned plan of God, once God learned what human beings were capable of left to their own devices. So, God began again. I think God had a greater vision than just slowing us down a bit.

In the tweaked plan for humans, God determined they should be as various as the other creatures God had made. From that point forward, the languages of three people would be as different as the songs of three birds. Wouldn't that be an improvement over a world in which all birds sounded alike?

In the end, God determined we need not be left to our own limited and short sighted plans, but instead as the Creator of a better improved plan, God would make us into new creations in Christ, filled with the very Spirit of God which when released upon and infused in us, would lead to glorious diversity and mutual understanding.

So, God in the day of Pentecost filled some Jews and converts to Judaism with the ability to understand each other for a few precious hours. Even those mere 65-90 minutes changed the course of history and has touched our very own lives over two thousand years later.

On the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon that diverse crowd of Jews from various ethnic groups. Then, Paul who had a conversion a few years after Jesus died, when the Holy Spirit fell upon him, found that he was now to love and work with the Christian he once hated. Through the continual work of the Holy Spirit, the early church worked on greater inclusion of women, and before too long the Church was filled

with both rich and poor, slave and free, male and female, and Jew and Gentile, citizens and government officials.

Now, I would be lying to you boldface, if I told you the early church was some Shangri La; for there were serious disagreements, territorialism, self-centeredness, and even some exclusion. Yet, the plan had been set in motion by the Holy Spirit of God began coming into fruition. And in the end, the Bible assures us people from every nation and tongue shall come together before the throne of God in the New Jerusalem. This is God's new and improved vision, it is ours to trust in the beauty and purpose of that vision and to work everyday of our lives till it comes into complete fruition.

John and Molly Chester had one challenge after another amidst their diverse farm – the birds ate huge holes in nearly all their fruit, the coyotes killed over one hundred chickens in just one evening, that was till they brought in two great Pyrenees dogs to scout the perimeter of the chicken pen. Then there were the snails, which came in mass and in one day alone they pulled off 9,000 snails from their fruit trees, that was until they bought and released onto their pond ducks. You guessed it, their favorite meal escargot.

We are releasing pesticides and predators as a way to stem the tide of our diversity. Yet, what is needed is for us to recognize our diversity and let it work itself out. For John and Molly, the farm moved from everyday crisis management to the diversity of nature managing itself after five very difficult years.

John Chester said, “When we started this farm people told us, ‘You're not going to feed the world with this kind of food.’ And we were like, ‘We're not trying to feed the world, we're just trying to feed our community.’ Big changes start with little revolutions.”

A small revolution began which lasted only for an hour or so on that first Pentecost, in a city in the Middle East. And yet, that revolution has done nothing less than reach around the world.

Yes, at St. James, we too are the “biggest little farm”, yet let us never think that the work we do here and the work you do wherever God sends you from here is not part of nor significant - in the big revolution God’s Spirit is doing through followers of Jesus who are working and living in the Spirit and Vision of Pentecost!