

Day of Pentecost (Whitsunday): May 31, 2020
“One Language—One Word”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What do believers and unbelievers have in common? Language. Both the faithful and the unfaithful use many words to communicate. You may have noticed in the bulletin a note about the Old Testament reading, *“The Hebrew and its translation here are meant to be clunky. It forces the reader to slow down and pay more attention to the words.”* That is just what we will do.

On the Day of Pentecost, we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles’ to do what? Speak the Gospel! Now here is where the difference lies: the Holy Spirit works through the faithful to speak words of life, while the devil works through the unfaithful to speak words of death.

The reading from Acts is the reversal of Genesis 11. The main details in the Tower of Babel are readily known by many, but many also forget the chapter and a half before. After the flood, Noah began to farm the land. He got drunk and laid naked in his tent. Ham saw this, and rather than helping to cover his father’s shame, he ran out and gossiped to his brothers. This deplorable action of gossiping and running to ruin another’s reputation by spreading shame, may have gotten a laugh today. What it got from Noah was words of judgment.

Luther speaks at length about the actions of unfaithful Ham against believing Noah. Like Adam, Noah stands as biological father, household father, government father and church father. Also, like Adam, Noah watches as His own child persecutes the church, persecutes the faithful. Through Adam sin entered into all creation, and this corruption is seen in Cain with Abel. Even after the flood, sin and wickedness remains, and unbelief and words that lead to death will be ultimately taken away from mankind. The curse of mixed-up languages is really a blessing. God will use this to teach man there is only one thing necessary – there is One Word, One God, *“one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the*

one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”¹

What does this have to do with the Tower of Babel and the Day of Pentecost? A quick glance through Chapter 10 and the descendants of Ham reveal some rather interesting names who began nations. From the gossiping, persecuting unbeliever come Cush, Egypt, Canaan, Babel, Jubusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Sodom, and Gomorrah. The truth of God’s Word, the judgment and promise of the Flood was passed from Noah to his sons. Shem faithfully taught his children, and they handed it down faithfully to his several-generation grand-child Abram.

Ham received the same teaching and lived through the same event. His unbelief was also handed down and you know the stories, the myths, the twisting, and the horrible things taught and lived by the nations I just listed—especially Egypt, Canaan, Sodom and Gomorrah.

Babel was also part of this group. The account of the tower built by the nation of Babel is recorded for our comfort and instruction. The first verse explains, “***The whole earth had one language and one word.***”² What an amazing situation. With the same language, they all had the same words; yet, with the same words the stone heart of unbelief twists that one Word of God into death. The motive of the unbelievers is clear, “We are supposed to be spread out over the land to care for it and give glory to God. Instead, ***we will brick bricks and fire fires.*** We will make bricks like stone that no one has yet seen with fires that no one has ever been able to do. Come on! We will build for ourselves and city and a tower with its top in the heavens and make a name for ourselves so we are not dispersed over the face of the earth.”

This was not just to make a name for themselves for the whole world to talk about their new, stronger, better than ever bricks, or inventive construction methods, or even a grand city with magnificent structures. This was about pride and worship. In direct defiance of God’s explicit order, “***Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,***”³ the prideful says, “No. I will do what I want. If God wants it different, let

¹ Ephesians 4:4-6

² Genesis 11:1

³ Genesis 9:1

Him stop me. If He doesn't stop me, then it must be what He wants." Instead of going, they dwelt. They set out to make a new government and a new church. The tower was a place of worship; it was a place in which they could point and say, "Look. See how successful we are. God has allowed it, so He must approve. Come and worship here, you can be closer to God."

Here we see a divide in the conscience of believers and unbelievers. The unbeliever knows the word, and smugly disregards the punishment. As Luther said, *"It is no trivial sin to harden oneself against conscience and to glory in a sin willingly and knowingly."* The ungodly do not fully believe that their dispersion, the punishments of God, will take place. We learn this with Adam, *"it is the nature of sin to lie still and be quiet for a time while the day is hot, that is, while lust and sin reign and man, overwhelmed and engrossed by Satan, pays no attention to the Word of God but disregards it, as if God were sleeping or simply did not exist. But toward evening, after the heat of the day, the Lord begins to walk about in Paradise; and His voice is heard, no longer a pleasing and delightful voice, as it was before sin, but a terrifying one, which Adam is unable to bear."*⁴

Because God is patient and long-suffering, a test of faith is given also to the faithful. Does God pay attention to the sins of the ungodly? Does He really listen to the prayers of the faithful? Psalm 73 gives answer, ***"How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"***⁵ Yes! He is God!

The prideful man thought his work was so magnificent; yet, it is next to nothing in God's sight. God had to "come down" to see the city and the tower. Of course God is everywhere, so what else can this be but an emphasis on the smallness of our work compared to God. What are our words compared to the Words of God? On this Day of Pentecost, do we speak our own words of death or the Lords Words of Life? We must examine our lives and root out all smugness and pride that our sinful nature seeks to set before God.

Most readily is this seen in worship. Do we gather to bring our words and works before God, or do we gather to have God bring His words and works to us? The smugness of the sinful pride seeks to define worship as my work to God. This is

⁴ Luther, AE 2, pp. 210-228

⁵ Psalm 73:11

my tower and my city. I will worship how I want and God will see how great I really am. This is what drives many to then believe, “If worship is my work to God, I can do more for God outside of these walls. I can get just as much God in my boat, on the golf-course, in my field, in the stadium, in my bed, on my couch, wherever.” And if your definition of worship is your work to God, then, sure, you are correct. God will come down and see your tower and your city that you have built for yourself. You seek to make a name for yourself, and so God will judge you by that name.

See the work of God here in Genesis 11. Jesus says in Luke, “***Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.***”⁶ To break the unity of false hearts, God mixes the languages. Those who mixed beliefs, those who mix sin and grace, now have languages mixed. There is still one word, but now more than one language. How does God crush the hearts of stone? God does not use swords, tanks, missiles, laser beams or light sabers; He uses the Word.

One language, one word –this is restored on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit un-mixes the languages by loosening the tongues of the Apostles and Peter preaches, “***Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.***”⁷

Like the congregation after the flood, like the church today, the congregation assembled to hear Peter’s sermon were filled with both believers and unbelievers. Some were amazed, and some thought they were drunk—spewing lies and conspiracy theories or words of oppression and killers of freedom.

For the godly, whether it is Shem or you, “***the descent of the Lord is most delightful and most welcome.***”⁸ God makes a distinction between the ungodly and His own children. For the smug in their own works, the descendants of Ham, He

⁶ Luke 11:17

⁷ Acts 2:22-24

⁸ Luther

calls them “The children of Adam.” It may seem as though God is slow to answer. It may seem as though God does not care.

Brothers and sisters, behold the cross. See with perfect timing, “*God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’*”⁹

Through the font you have received His Holy Spirit. In faith, the believer recalls, “*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*”¹⁰ In the waters of Baptism, God’s own name is placed upon you. He opens your ears and gives you the One Word. The One Word in the flesh is now joined to you. He has come down to die for you, and He has come down to join you in His everlasting body.

In this one body, the church, we gather. We don’t build our city and tower. We gather to simply receive. Our building speaks and teaches in Whom we believe and whom we confess. It is God who gives you life—which you remember walking by the font. It is Him who gives forgiveness won in His death and spoken through His word as you hear the absolution spoken. It is Christ, the Word in the flesh, who works even today through the flesh of His servants.

We have three reminders each week, not only reminding of the Trinity, but what really happens here—the processional cross declares we preach Christ and Him crucified, the torch declares Christ is the light of the world, the pastor dressed in vestments confesses the office, not the man, who dispenses the gifts. The pastor while a poor, miserable sinner just like you, is vested with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, a cross around His neck to speak Christ crucified alone, and cincture to be girded with the truth, and a stole confessing this man is yoked to Christ. He speaks. The people of God sit in the pews all facing the altar. His word is read from the lectern and preached from the pulpit. His body and His blood are dispensed upon the altar.

Do you see it? One Word—Jesus. Many languages—water, word, bread and wine. The Gospel given in languages that all can understand – *Parthians and Medes*

⁹ Galatians 4:4-6

¹⁰ Acts 4:12

and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, Grinnellians, Newtonians, even Minnesota and those belonging to parts of Nebraska. All can, “Know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”¹¹ And when they are cut to the heart, they may also hear, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”¹²

Let us pray,

“Send us Thy Spirit, teach us truth;
Thou Son, O set us free
From fancied wisdom, self-sought ways,
To make us one in Thee.”¹³ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹¹ Acts 2:36

¹² Acts 2:38-39

¹³ In Adam, We Have All Been One LSB 569:5

**Prayer of the Church
The Day of Pentecost
31 May 2020**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For all baptized believers, that they would be given ears to hear and an eagerness to learn all that the Holy Spirit teaches them about their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the salvation they have through Him, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For spiritual renewal in our congregation, district, Synod and the whole Church on earth, that by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, we would long to keep the One True Word of Christ, dwell in His peace, sing God's praises and love our neighbors, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who serve in Christ's Church, that all pastors may faithfully preach Law and Gospel, all missionaries be fruitful in their labors, and all church workers be faithful in their service, so that all who call on the name of the Lord may be saved, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For peace among the nations, for those who rule over us, for those who protect and defend us, and for liberty, that the peoples of our world would be blessed to live in health, peace and quietness, unhindered by threats of violence, oppression or fear, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life especially His servants, *William, Stephanie, and Barb*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For the joy and blessings that God has granted *Steve & Pam and Ken & Laurie* during the years of their marriage; that God would assist them always by His grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards Him and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that He have promised; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For an end to the pandemic, for those afflicted in body or spirit, for the shut-in and the lonely, and for those who have requested our prayers, [*including Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Ken, and those we name in our hearts,*] that their hearts would neither be troubled nor afraid, for nothing can separate them from the love God has for them in Christ, who has overcome the ruler of this world and secured for them eternal peace in His Kingdom, which has no end, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who have gone before us and now rest from their labors, let us give thanks to the Lord; that we would follow them, as they followed Christ, and be found faithful by those who come after us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Through our Lord, Jesus Christ, all glory, honor and worship is Yours, Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit, both now and forevermore. **Amen.**