

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Anti-Babel

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 11:1-9 (NRSVue)

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth, and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

New Testament Lesson

Acts 2:1-11 (NRSVue)

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ 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—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Bible/Sermon Focus

This Sunday was Pentecost Sunday! Pentecost Sunday is the day we celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, the Paraclete to the disciples. There are many stories before this one in the Bible where we hear about the activity of the Holy Spirit, but this is where we witness to a fulfillment promised by Jesus, that the Spirit would come and teach us everything we need to know. It is the Holy Spirit which inspires the creation of the church. It is the Holy Spirit which creates and directs the church. God sent God's Spirit to inspire us toward God's

will in the world. And we, like the disciples in our story from Acts, witness to the work of that Spirit. Celebrating Pentecost is kind of like celebrating the birthday of the church.

Our lectionary for Pentecost provided another story from the Bible that we heard this week. The story of the Tower of Babel comes from a section of Torah that we call the *Primeval History*, which spans the first 11 chapters of Genesis (the first book of the Bible). The Primeval History is filled with myths that are comparable to other myths from the ancient near-east. The stories of creation, the Garden of Eden, the Flood and the Tower of Babel are all included in this section of Genesis.

The Primeval History contains themes, one of which is the human attempt to become divine. The blurring of these lines between creator and creation is notable. In the garden, the humans eat the forbidden fruit the serpents tells Eve will make them become like God. The flood is a result of humans mating with divine beings (Genesis 6). And in the Tower of Babel humans plan to build a tower into the heavens—to be where the gods are (monotheism hadn't fully developed in this stage of Israel's history. Yahweh was considered the God of the gods—the head of a "divine counsel.")

These stories speak into a human issue of us trying to be God—and of our lust for power. In the Primeval History we witness to a people who are trying to take power, whereas in our story from Acts, we have humans receiving power. In our story from Genesis the people are trying to build a tower to the "heavens," as if earth and earthly life are not enough. In Acts God sends the Spirit here, on earth, where we are called to live and tend and be. In Babel the people used uniformity to reach for power. In Acts, God uses diversity in the giving of power.

In this sermon series, *Make Us One*, we are considering how we are united not by our own uniformity but by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are considering how we are united by God's priorities, not by our own. On Pentecost we witness to a God who sends the Spirit to all different kinds of people. The very foundation of the church of Jesus Christ, inspired by the Spirit begins with witnesses from a multitude of backgrounds. The foundation of the church is not the sameness of the power hungry, but the unity of those open enough to experience the love of God.

Discussion Questions

1. When have you found yourself lusting for power? How much power is too much power?
2. What is your personal experience with the Holy Spirit like? What is the role of others and community in that experience?
3. Why do you think so many of our earliest recorded stories on earth about humans blurring the lines between themselves and their creator(s)?
4. Give an example of when you and others worked to share power?

Prayer

God of Unity, forgive us for our idolatry when we try to be you. Free us from the blasphemy of making gods of ourselves. Thank you for sending your Spirit. Thank you for creating and sustaining your church. In all of our diversity, make is one, O Lord. Amen.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place."