

SERMON FOR JUNE 5, 2022

TEXT: GENESIS 11:1-9 AND ACTS 2:1-21

THEME: BUILDING FROM BABEL

its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

In the name of Jesus:

The quest to build the world's tallest building has an ancient history. For almost four thousand years, the Great Pyramid of Giza, Egypt, held the title. Then there was the Lincoln Cathedral in England, finished in 1311. Much later, the Washington Monument, the Eiffel Tower, and, most famously, the Empire State Building each became the world's tallest building. In recent years, the quest to be tallest seems to have become an obsession—so competitive that an organization, the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, has actually become the official referee. The CTBUH now recognizes title holders in several categories. For example, the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, had the tallest architectural top until it was topped by Taipei 101 in Taiwan. But

the highest occupied floor belongs to the Shanghai World Financial Center. The Sears Tower in Chicago lengthened its antenna in 2000 to take over the lead in that category. And for a time, the World Trade Center in New York had the world's highest observation deck.

Since the Tower of Babel, humans have sought to build structures soaring into the heavens, in an attempt to boast of their own human ingenuity and strength. When we look at the Tower of Babel, we see not just an attempt to build a physical structure, but an attempt to boast of human achievement rather than giving credit where credit is due, to God who is the Author and Builder of all things. But towers and buildings eventually come crashing down. The Great Pyramid in Egypt, for instance, has lost more than twenty five feet to erosion. No matter how hard man tries, his efforts won't last forever. The Bible has it right: there is a way that seems right to man and that way ends in death.

In the Old Testament lesson for today, the story is about the Tower of Babel and the confusion of languages. Soon after the flood in Noah's time, the people spoke only one language, a common language where everyone would understand each other. There was no need for an interpreter.

The people of that day had one desire, it was the same desire that their first parents had in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve took the fruit and ate it in the Garden because they wanted to be like God. In the story of the people who wanted to build the Tower of Babel, they wanted to build a city and tower to make a name for themselves. They sought to boast in their own efforts. They were going to build a tower and city that would be second to none. Everyone would see how great this people were when they took a look at this great edifice.

But the Lord had other plans, He confused the languages of the people. Instead of one common language, they had many languages, and they were stopped dead in their tracks. Seeing as they were not able to understand one another, they separated, each language group going their own way, thereby punishing the people but carrying out God's mandate to spread out over the face of the earth. Populations would now be separated not only by physical boundaries such as rivers, bodies of water, and mountains, but they also would be separated by the ability to communicate with one another.

On the first Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven in great power and might. Listen to how Luke records what happened: "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it

filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The people at Pentecost were able to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak. This was not some type of gibberish, this was the undoing of what happened long ago at Babel.

People from different lands, with different languages, people from every nation under heaven, each one was hearing them speak in his own language. There were Parthians and Medes and 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, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians— each heard the Good News of Jesus in their own language, each, without prior knowledge of the language, no tutoring, no classwork, no previous instruction or translation was involved.

The miracle of Pentecost was that the ability to communicate with one another returned, as followers of Jesus communicated the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ through the medium of a variety of previously unlearned languages. The Gospel of God’s love for sinners on account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was made known on Pentecost to different people in their own language so that they could not only understand

what was saying, but so that by the power of the Holy Spirit they would come to believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

God the Holy Spirit showed at Pentecost that He was going to build something that lasts. Jesus spoke of it when He said, "I will build My Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Now how would God build His Church? Not in the usual way, using human strength and might and intellect.

God instead built His Church on the Rock, His Son, Jesus Christ. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on twelve confused men and a handful of others, and in that outpouring of the Spirit 3000 people repented of their sins and trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The same thing happens today, as the Holy Spirit works faith into the hearts and lives of sinners, who hear the Good News of Jesus, repent of their sins, and then trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The Spirit is at work powerfully today, here as you hear the Good News of Jesus. The Spirit is at work in congregations among people who speak a different language than we do, whether it be Russian, German, French, Spanish, and Portuguese just to name a few. Through missionaries and mission organizations such as Lutheran

Bible Translators, the Holy Spirit is at work to bring the Gospel to people of different nations and languages.

By God's grace you have been made a member of His Church, and His will is to build His Church on Jesus, using you as His instrument. Even as you pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come," God answers that prayer as His Spirit brings together Christians from different races, tribes and languages, making them into one people called the Holy Christian Church, a people who follow Jesus and seek, not to make a name for themselves, but only to give God the glory that He deserves.

For there is no difference, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that by believing in Him you will have life by His name. He loves you with an everlasting love. Jesus lived for you, died for you, and rose again for you. He has forgiven you all of your sins. You are now His friends. And that love, given to you, is to be shared with others, with the message, "Come and be God's friends, for He who knew no sin became sin for you that you might have life by His name. And when you share the message of God's forgiveness in Christ, the Spirit uses that witness to build something great and eternal, His Church, the Body of Christ, and His promise is certain and sure, the gates of Hell won't prevail against it. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name. Amen