

“From the Tower to the Power”- Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21

Everyone in this room is a part of a minority group. Less than 10% of the world has English as their first language. Just fewer than 500 million people speak English. Twice as many people, 1 billion, speak Mandarin Chinese. There are over 200 languages spoken with another 2000 dialects used by people. Linguists, those who study languages have concluded what the Bible has already known and that at one time all of the earth spoke the same language but that all changed with our story in Genesis 11.

The people in our first story were the descendants of Noah who had again multiplied after the great flood in which most of the world had been destroyed. They came to a fertile plain and settled and formed a permanent settlement that included a city and then they built a large tower. The tower was called Babel which in Hebrew means confused.

The purpose of this tower which archeologists said was over 240 feet tall was two-fold: First of all, the builders wanted to make sure that there was unity among the people. They wanted to assure themselves that they would never be scattered again. God would see in this tower the sins of self-sufficiency and pride. They wanted to make sure that they would not be forgotten. Secondly, this large tower would hold them together and keep them secure, even if God would break his covenant with them and send them another flood. This tower represented a defilement of God and a turning their backs on God and his promises. They said to God, “We no longer trust you. This tower is our security.” God’s answer to all of this defilement was to come down and create confusion among the people by causing to speak in different languages thus forcing them to scatter and living among those who spoke the same language. Instead of unity they had disunity and confusion.

Much later in history another group of God’s people met together. The Bible tells us it was on the Day of Pentecost. Their purpose for meeting was much different than the group who met in Genesis. They did not meet to make a name for themselves. They did not meet to defy God, nor turn their backs on his love and promises. They came rather to receive and open themselves up for the

coming of God's Holy Spirit that was promised to them. They were not of one language like their forefathers in Genesis, but gathered from different places with different languages and cultures. They were confused and uncertain about their future as God's people, but their faith in the risen Christ caused them to look eagerly forward in faith. God came also on that day and the Spirit of God came rushing in like a mighty wind and there were a noise like flames of fire and all of sudden people who did not know each other or understand each other began together hearing the message that God was bringing them. Thus the church was born.

We can see two very different incidences in the Bible. The first one is full of arrogance and self-fulfillment that led to confusion, disunity, and scattering; the second one full of humility, renewed faith in God, which led to unity, strengthening, and a new and great future.

There are two incidences: Babel and the Day of Pentecost. There are times in our lives we find ourselves as citizens of Babel. We are eagerly trying to impress people. We try to make a name for ourselves. We look at our work and our accomplishments and aren't we so proud? They built the tower thinking it would keep them safe and secure in case God would go back on his word and send another flood. They didn't trust God. We find life going along so smoothly and things go our way and we all of a sudden find ourselves not talking with or needing God anymore. There are times when in our life we stop trusting God like the people of Babel. Our money and education will see us through. God gets forgotten. Then it happens. The bottom falls out. We get sick or lose a job, or have a financial crisis. Then we clamor for God. Where is he? How come he's not here to help me? We see others around us who have risen to the pinnacle of notoriety and success to disappear into obscurity.

When many of us were children we were taught to dislike and even fear Communism. We were taught not to trust and to declare our enemy the Soviet Union. Many of you might remember Nikita Krusechev who was the premier of the USSR during the 1950s and early 60s. In 1961 when he met with the young and new President John Kennedy, he told Kennedy that Communism and the

USSR would bury the United States. We lived in fear for what this man and his nation could possibly do to us. We built bomb shelters in our backyards. We had civil defense drills at school. I remember living overseas and buying a children's book that was printed in the USSR and my father made me get rid of it because it might be poisoned. We lived in fear. Three short years later in 1964 Khrushchev was ousted from power and in 1971 he died in obscurity in a village deep in Siberia.

We are citizens of Babel when we find ourselves trying to live life without God. With an attitude of thinking we can play God and almost be God. With our advanced technology in all areas of life it almost seems like we don't need God. But God is calling us down from the top of the Tower of Babel. He is calling us off of that tower of smugness. He is calling us away from those Babel values.

He is instead calling us to take hold of the Pentecost experience of self-emptying and a reliance on God characterized by sharing and caring. We are invited to rely on the Holy Spirit who can transform our lives and bring about wonderful change for our lives. The experience of Pentecost calls for a conversion from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. The day of Pentecost calls us away from the cultural-conscience of Babel to the Christ-centeredness of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost leads us away from building a tower to escape the world, but rather build relationship through Christ and meet the world. The message of Pentecost is one that unites all people.

When the sun shines through our stain glass window it is beautiful. If you look at this window from the outside you discover that it is cold and lifeless. If you go into the sanctuary and let the sun gently hit it, the colors are rich and beautiful in color and in story.

The experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the very same thing. The Babel experience looks at faith in God from the outside. One discovers that a Babel experience with God leaves one feeling cold and isolated. The Pentecost experience is where one discovers that looking at the Christian faith through the Spirit leaves one with a rich warm, deep, satisfying relationship with the living God.

Today starts a season called Pentecost. A season we begin that reminds us that the Holy Spirit is central to our growth in Jesus Christ. How we experience faith. How we look at all of life. I challenge all of us to go from tower mentality to power mentality.