

# “Hearing the Word”

Genesis 11:1-9

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes to the disciples and they are able to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in a multitude of languages, so that all the pilgrims from the Mediterranean world who had gathered in Jerusalem could hear the Gospel in their native tongue. However, some mocked them and said that they were drunk and were mumbling gibberish. Peter defends them and says, it is only the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour (9 in the morning) of course they are not drunk. It is a good argument, but not always an open and shut case.

This past Tuesday, after I had finished teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade religion at St. James, I stopped at the Shell station at 24<sup>th</sup> and State to get gas and something to quench my thirst. The guy in front of me in line was also getting something to quench his thirst, but it wasn't Diet Coke. He had a 12 pack of beer. I thought it a little early, it was only 9:30 in the morning, But apparently it was 5:00 somewhere. But maybe he was getting it for later. Who am I to judge?

He then turns to me, sees me in my clerical and mutters something unintelligible. It was like listening to the character Gabby Johnson from the movie Blazing Saddles (if you know the reference). And then turns back and heads out the door. The clerk says, “I think he's had enough beer already.” Thankfully, he was not driving

But his unintelligible mumbling is what the disciples sounded like to those who did not know the languages of the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and all the other nations recorded in Acts chapter 2.

Pentecost demonstrates how Christ has come to reverse all the judgment that comes with sin. The wages of sin is death, which is the worst judgment Christ overcame through the cross and empty tomb. The judgment upon the people at the tower of Babel, we read about in our Old Testament lesson, brought about the confusion of languages.

The confusion of language at the tower of Babel is one of the profound events in the history of God's interaction with His people. Up until that point, language was universal. Adam was able to speak with God. The language of the people was the language of heaven. If you ask any Jew, or my Hebrew professor at the Seminary, they will be quick to tell you that in heaven everyone speaks Hebrew.

The Bible does not say this, but clearly, the ancient people spoke the common language handed down from Adam. It is God's desire for His children to hear the gracious words spoken by their loving Father. At Babel, they could hear God's Word, but they were not keeping it, guarding it, cherishing it. Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep (that is, guard and cherish) My Word." Those ancient people were hearing the Word of God, but they weren't really "hearing" it.

Their goal was to build a tower with its top in the heavens. They wanted to be where God dwells, and get there by their own power and will. They wanted to climb the mountain of salvation. They wanted, like Adam and Eve in the garden, they wanted to be like God. That is so tempting, and it is our sinful nature's greatest desire.

Isn't it ironic that our sinful nature's greatest desire is to take from God what rightfully only belongs to Him? Listen to the world around us

– the sinful mind of man says the universe and life as we know it does not need a Creator. The newest scientific theories, not just speculate but, claim that there is evidence that matter can spawn out of nothingness.

Salvation by our works has always been popular. The Pharisees claimed righteousness for themselves. Indulgences were sold promising entrance into heaven – and if you think this practice is over, you need to get out more. One of my Seminary professors had a piece of cloth he purchased from a monastery in Europe. The note attached said that if you died with that piece of cloth with you, that you would gain automatic entrance into heaven – no time in purgatory. With a piece of cloth like that, Jesus and His cross only need to provide the potential for salvation which we work out on our own – which is the false teaching Luther fought against.

Likewise, Charles Wesley of the Reformed tradition said, “The righteousness of Christ is necessary to *entitle* us to Heaven, personal holiness to *qualify* us for it.” That also sounds a lot like what Luther fought against.

Our sinful mind really does struggle with “hearing” and “keeping” (guarding and cherishing) Christ’s Word. Jesus death and resurrection is the only thing that qualifies you for heaven. Salvation is a gift, by grace, through faith, apart from works. When someone says that your personal holiness qualifies you for heaven, they are attempting to take from God what rightfully only belongs to Him.

The irony is that, as I mentioned last week, God’s greatest desire is to bring you into a relationship with Him and have, as Jesus said, “perfect oneness.” God’s deepest desire is to be one with you and give you a full portion of the inheritance of His kingdom – as a gift. He

desires to no longer treat you as a slave to sin, but he gives you the full rights as a son – whether you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, as St. Paul says.

Our sinful nature's deepest desire is to have what belongs to God, but we want to take it on our own, not receive it as a free gift. All that God has, He willingly offers to His children. He extends to us the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life in His kingdom which has no end. Yet, the multitudes have rejected this, sought their own path to the things of God, and follow a path that leads to destruction and despair.

The people of Babel sought to build a tower to the heavens, and dwell in the place of God, and make a name for themselves, by their own “personal holiness” so that they would not be scattered upon the face of the earth. And this led directly to them being scattered upon the face of the earth.

God desires for you to dwell with Him, and He willingly gives you His name. He marked you with it in Baptism. This is the amazing part of the Pentecost event. The multitudes actually listen and hear God's Word. The multitudes receive the free gift and 3000 are baptized that day.

Pentecost is truly an amazing day. God's judgment upon the people is reversed; the confusion of the languages is overcome in the coming of the Holy Spirit; and God gathers His people in righteousness worshiping one Lord, having one faith, one Baptism; and hearing and keeping God's Word. Guard and cherish the gifts of God. Amen.