

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost
Saturday, June 7, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, June 8, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

“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.

We hear in Genesis how these languages came to be. And when you study languages, they don't evolve, they devolve. That is, they become less complex over time. If anyone wants details on that, I will be glad to share that privately. We covered it in our Sunday morning class a while back when we looked at Genesis 11.

But this multitude of languages didn't come as a blessing. This was a curse. This is akin to what we see God say in Romans 1. God gives humanity up to their sin of rebellion and essentially says, “This is the way you want to live? Have at it. Let's see how you do without My word.” And then in Genesis 12, the next chapter, we hear God's call to Abraham. God has not forgotten His promise to Adam.

God has also not forgotten, nor completely forsaken those He cursed at Babel. 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. But Christ came to overcome all of the fallenness of God's creation.

The judgment upon the people at the tower of Babel brought about the confusion of languages, which was a curse. The confusion of language 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.

St. Paul refers to Hebrew as "the tongue of angels." 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.

Life and salvation apart from God has always been popular. The Pharisees claimed righteousness for themselves. The Roman Church sold indulgences 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 alone. 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 God.

The irony is that God’s greatest desire, His Passion, is to be with you, to be in you, that you may, as Jesus says in the Upper Room, “[you] may become perfectly one” [Jn. 17:23]. 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 those gifts of God. Amen.