

The Day of Pentecost, May 15, 2016

Let's Talk

Genesis 11:1–9



Dear Friends in Christ,

Knowing how to communicate is a good thing; knowing what to say, how to say things are ingredients for a good communication. But of equal importance is to know how to listen, how to receive what is being said.

I like what Will Durant said: “Talk is cheap because the supply always exceeds the demand. One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say.” Knowing the words to say and how to say them, and when to say them is important, which leads us to appreciate the gift of language, the spoken word.

We all begin having a language to speak. From our first words and the huge deal new parents make over them to all the ways we use language in our adult lives, words and language are an intimate part of our everyday lives, and some of us venture to know one or two more so we can communicate with each other.

But have ever wondered where language came from? Where or when did it start? The story of language, of words, is older than our human story. Actually it starts with God, the creator of all things. And when He created all things not only he spoke creation into being, but also gifted us with the gift of language. At the Creation the Spirit and the Word of God were living and active communicating with each other, and speaking Creation into being. (Gen 1:3), and gifting words and language to men by breathing his Spirit into Adam (2:19) so that we would be able to communicate with one another but also with God.

But, it doesn't end there in fact the whole story of the Bible is the story of language as God communicates with His people, and how his people should communicate with God. And, is also the story of language among God's people. But as we see in the Old Testament reading for today, when language and communication is misappropriated there are consequences.

That's the story of our Old Testament lesson. The tower of Babel is a tragic story about language (v 1).

A story that reveals what was in the hearts of people, hear once again these words: "And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn 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, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (vv 3–4).

Now, there is nothing wrong with wanting to make bricks and build a city or a tower, or anything like that, the wrong lies in the reasons of building it! And that's what we see here with this people, in fact we see two problems that stem from their heart: First, they wanted to build the tower to make a name for themselves, fame, power, pride, idolatry are the issues. And second, they wanted to remain one race, they wanted not to be scattered throughout the world! Now how is that a problem? First, it is a clear violation of God's will to call on his name (Gen. 4:26) and worship him only above anything else; and second a clear violation of God's command to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28; 9:1).

There is great power in language. There is power in words, the spoken and written word that God himself gave power to it. He even speaks of it (v 6): "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do."

And what they begun to do already was giving up calling on the name of the Lord (4:26) breaking therefore what would be the Second Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11)

People back then, the builders of Babel, thought they were so clever in their use of language, that wanted to make a name for themselves, that was the root of their sin, not the building but the permeation of their name and the glorification of it.

But for it, they must keep together; they didn't want to be dispersed. They were looking for security and comfort in their unity. Instead of seeking unity, security and comfort and God their Creator they relied on their own human strength for comfort and

unity, but that brought another problem, they begun to worship one another in the essence of their unity and comfort. In other words they were worshipping the creation, and the tower was becoming their altar, instead of worshipping God who made them and in whom we have all things (Romans 1:24-25).

What about us today?

Is there anything that resembles Babel? Anything in our heart that is saying let us build a tower?

We all are sinful human beings, and because of our human flesh, more often than not we build our own babel tower as well. We worship our names more than God's name.

We do know the Second Commandment, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain." (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11) and we have learned what the Catechism teaches us it means, it says: "We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." (The Small Catechism)

We have given a great invitation in these words. The invitation to call on his name by the power of the Spirit living in us! The name that we are given in our baptisms for our salvation, protection and assurance that we belong to him, but do we trust that? Don't we make idols for and out of ourselves too?

A preacher by the name of Timothy Keller talks about the way we make idols out of others and ourselves: "Our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value on we essentially 'deify.' We will look to it with all the passion and intensity of worship and devotion, even if we think ourselves as highly irreligious."

In other words, when our unity becomes our security, our unity becomes our god. When other people and our unified relationships with them become our comfort or our identity, then God neither is our Comforter nor our Identity.

Have we sought unity by ourselves and for ourselves here in this congregation? Friends we must seek unity, the unity of our congregation, of God's people but in and for God alone. We must comfort teach other in our times of need, but with the comfort that comes from God for He is our comfort and our strength.

Do you know what happens when we do seek a name for ourselves, or when we do seek unity and comfort in and for ourselves?

As a church we get sidetracked from the purposes of God by seeking to live in a self-contained world, in a club as we said a few Sundays ago. We don't associate with the world as a Church we like to live as the world lives but not as Christians, as mundane people. Yes we are to live in the world but not for the world or of the world. We are the salt of the world and the light of the world; we are not salt for ourselves and light to the enlightened.

But also we miss the point and the purpose of language, that we would talk and communicate the Gospel. That's what the Holy Spirit did and led the first disciples to do on the day of Pentecost. They began to communicate the Gospel in the language that people understood. To the scattered people all over. Bringing the comfort of the Gospel everywhere and anywhere, in the language of the Holy Spirit!

Now let's see what God does about this case. Verse five says: "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built."

"And the Lord Came down..." that's an astounding statement. The tower was to reach the heavens, it had to be the tallest skyscraper there ever was, but in God's sight it was too small that God has to leave the heights of heaven and come all the way down to inspect this tiny structure of men.

Do you think that it is a "holy scorn"? This tower is so far from reaching heaven, God can't see it from there. Of course, God can see everything everywhere. But then again that's what humans do, we want to impress God with our greatest achievements, with our activities, at the risk of being scorned by God by him having to come down and see what we have done, we can't even impress God by whatever we can achieve, and do you know why we can't impress him, because he gives us the mind talents and abilities in the first place, only we want to appropriate them for ourselves and our pride.

What did God do with the people then? He threw them into confusion and scattered them. Our text of meditation says: 'Come, let us go down and there confuse their language,' (God Says) so that they may not understand one another's speech."⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.⁹ Therefore 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.” (vv 6–9).

Isn't that the story of our lives? Consider the irony: We talk big, but God's Word is always the final answer.

God's purpose for man has always been to go out and do His will. We can only be complete in Him and we can only be satisfied as we live in will. He is the One who satisfies, not things or activities. He is our comfort and our unity, he is our enlightenment and, and most importantly he is our salvation. He is the one who comes down to us.

So today, there is good news. There is good news because and as the early Christians understood this verse to be a reference to the coming of the pre-incarnate Jesus. God coming down refers to the coming of Christ to earth.

When God appeared to humans in the Old Testament, we can expect it was in the same way as He would appear to us in the New Testament, through His Son Jesus. It is he, God's Word who later became flesh (Jn 1:1–3, 14) who came to save.

He came to die in punishment for our sins, but then to rise victorious over the grave. Dear friends, God has the last word in Christ. In fact he is the Word.

In him our sins of seeking a name for ourselves, in him the false worshiping our unity, and our side truck as a church, all is forgiven in Christ. There at the Cross all our sins were forgiven, now we can freely invoke his name, now freely trust his name, for his name is above all names.

Your sins are forgiven, these very words, along with the Word in Baptism and Holy Communion, are God coming down all powerfully to change the world, all powerful even through our speaking. But there is more.

God still talks to us through and by the ever comforting presence of his Spirit.

Today we observe Pentecost Day, the day in which the Holy Spirit came as Jesus promised he would come. Even through the Spirit God keeps talking to us, and encourages us to talk to him.

Through the Holy Spirit we are guided in God's word to do God's will, for God's desire is that we be complete in Him and be satisfied fully in him. He is the One who

satisfies, not things or activities. He is our comfort and our unity, he is our enlightenment and, and most importantly he is our salvation.

And he is the one who through the gift of language enables and moves us to speak and bless others with the Gospel as well.

He is the one who blesses us so we can bless others as well, not only with the blessings he gives us in material things, but even with the blessing of words, of language, for God did bless us with the gift of language, he uses the language to communicate with us to comfort us, and unite us, so we can be comforted and comfort others through the words of the Gospel, as God spoke through the prophet Isaiah when he said: "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57:15)

Know how to communicate is a good thing; know what to say, how to say things are ingredients for a good communication. But of equal importance is to know how to listen, how to receive what is being said.

Yet, even today God still longs to pour out His Spirit and His blessings on us, as we call on his name and worship him in unity, so that we would tell of the Good news to others. So that we know how to share the Gospel, the Gospel that has comforted us and now is comforting others, and then one day take us to be with him for eternity.

Until then we do take up the call to translate and proclaim the Gospel into all the languages of the world.

The Lord's words, not ours! In His name, amen.