

“The Winds of Change”

In the Old Testament story in Genesis 11:1-9, we have the story of the tower of Babel. Humans had attempted to build a structure so they could stay in one place and not have to disperse all over the earth as God had instructed them to do so after most everyone had been destroyed in the flood. At that time they had one language and were one people. But God thought it was best for there to be multiple cultures and that people to go all over the earth. So, he mixed up the peoples' languages so they could not understand each other, and they did not finish the structure. They left to go to all parts of the earth.

Then from Acts 2 comes Luke's imaginative way to build upon ancient stories. Luke sets the Christian community's gathering to coincide with Pentecost. This Jewish festival of weeks was an agrarian festival that celebrated the gift of the law from Mount Sinai.

This Sunday is the anniversary of Pentecost. Pentecost is often referred to as the church's birthday. Pentecost is the day when the gift of the Holy Spirit is given for all. Like a big birthday party, the invitation list at Pentecost was insane. Everyone was there. There were Galileans, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Romans, and Arabs. People were having such a good time they were thought to be drunk. But they were not drunk. As we read Acts 2,

they had just received the most amazing party favors of prophecy, visions, and dreams.

Pentecost was one of three pilgrimage feasts when the entire household of Israel gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the goodness of God towards the nation. On this particular day Jews who were dispersed all over the world had come to Jerusalem for a day long festival. The scripture says they were all devout Jews.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon them, the Apostles speak in many different languages. The gift of speaking in foreign languages enables the community, especially the apostles, to testify publicly to Israel. Those Jews who are ignorant about the Messiah are shown the way of the Lord Jesus by this testimony.

Peter is led by the Spirit to address the crowd. Some of those from other countries had made fun of what had happened. When they heard those with Galilean dialects speak in other languages, they jeered that these Galileans must be full of new wine. Peter initially retorted by saying that these people were not drunk; it was only nine o'clock in the morning. Peter then preaches to them about how what has happened is the fulfillment of the prophet Joel that God will pour out his Spirit upon all people. Peter then preached to them the meaning of what they had heard and he eventually called upon them to repent, be baptized in the name of

Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. All who name Jesus as their Lord and confess him as God's Messiah will be forgiven. At the end of the chapter we read that those who accepted Peter's message that day and were baptized brought about three thousand new people into the church community.

The multiplicity of languages, previously viewed as signaling our alienation from each one another, becomes God's vehicle for bringing salvation to the whole world. Christians became empowered to translate into every known language, so that everyone can hear of God's deeds of power and of the message of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our world today is more diverse than ever and we are placed with neighbors from every place on earth. Pentecost reminds us that we can jump over the barrier of foreign speech and learn others' languages in order to speak with them of a God who desires to save the entire world.

In closing, let us reflect on the great change brought about by Pentecost. God provided his Holy Spirit to us so we could once again commune together. To do this requires us to be willing to let God take control of our lives and change us as needed. Change is not easy but it is how we are transformed into being more like Christ. Think of the basic law of aerodynamics which allows for human flight. Planes fly into the wind to give them the lift needed to rise and engage in flight.

They do not take the easy way and go into the calm. This would do nothing for them. In the same way, we will not fly if we just go with the calm and do nothing—we must be willing to fly into the struggles of life and be transformed by the Holy Spirit as we fly higher in our Christian lives.