

RESTORED TO ONE LANGUAGE IN THE FAITH

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Fifty days have passed wherein the Church celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord; 10 days we have waited following the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord. Today, this congregation's 96 days of prayer end. With all of that in mind, hear again from the ancient Word of God that was chosen by the Church for the Pentecost Feast:

And all the earth had one language and few words.¹

Today, we celebrate with the Church catholic the return in the Church to a long-lost reality. After the worldwide deluge had wiped out every living thing from the landmass of the earth, through which only eight faithful had been saved by God through the waters in the Ark, that small band had again to fulfill the Word of the Lord first given to Adam and Eve. They were to be fruitful and multiply.² Noah, his wife, their sons and their wives, had begun to fill the earth.

Faithful Noah, and his devout son, Shem, were still living at the time as Noah's great-grandson, Nimrod, followed his faithless grandfather, Ham, in giving himself over to the temptations of this world. Nimrod, and his followers, you will recall, began their reign at Babel. It was at the founding of that city, wherein today's text begins, that *all the earth had one language and few words.*³ The Church should ever be aware of those realities.

We hear them again. Following the global Flood, there was one family. That whole family was saved by grace. That God did through the Faith by means of the Ark which carried them through waters that had drowned all unrepentant sinners.

The Church then was composed of Noah's entire family. All peoples from that time forward were born into his household. They were called to be the household of the Faith. That Church was to remember God's grace and be found faithful to God.

Even so, you may remember, that in that post-Flood Church, dissension, ridicule and false belief had quickly begun to appear. Of the three sons of Noah, Ham had fallen

¹ *Genesis 11:1*

² cf. *Genesis 9:7*

³ *Genesis 11:1*

into temptation. He received a curse for his breaking the Fourth Commandment. Ham's punishment fell onto his descendants. They were the prime instigators – due to land allocations as Noah's sons spread out from the grounded Ark – of the sins that brought forth today's record of God's wrath and His grace.

Such truths are put forth into the Church on Pentecost day each year. They are declared that we might be kept mindful that, in those who are to be numbered among the faithful, there are those who fall to temptations to sin. Specifically, today, we are hearing about unrepentant sinners in the Church who are found in every era. They are ones not trusting in God's Word, those who cause trouble in the Church. They do so by attempting to elevate their wants, desires and plans over God's revealed will. They are those who wish to be raised up in His Presence in order to make a name for themselves.

Against that type of thinking remain those in the Church who, by God's grace, humbly cling to His promises which He continues to give through His Word. They desire that all they do in this life be in accord with God's will. They, you who are the faithful, do not wish to make a name for yourselves. Rather, you continue to pray that God's Name be exalted among us, in His Church, and before the face of unrepentant sinners. That we might be equipped to do that daily, God grants us His Holy Spirit. He, working through His Word, leads us ever to the reality of God the Son lifted up in our sins to grant us forgiveness.

It is in that Spirit that this congregation's leaders developed and put before her members a 96 days of prayer booklet. Those daily petitions, also sent by email daily to those of us who subscribed, were offered that we might be led to speak with one voice, that God's will and Name be exalted. They, however well or poorly constructed, were to lead us in humble adoration. It is our prayer that, through the days that are ending today, God's will for this congregation might be discerned by us. Such will, by God's grace, through the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word, help to keep us from falling into the sin of the post-deluge Church. That is, that those who are named with God's Name determine to build an edifice to make a name for themselves.

Humble thinking, acting and speaking with one another and before God will, by God's grace, lead us to continue to discern His good and gracious will as we continue building a legacy in Christ-crucified. This, we pray, will be a gift for the generations to come. We pray that God might draw many into His House in Catalina – to hear of their sins, to be turned from them, and to receive His forgiveness through His Means of Grace.

To continually lead us all into that and more, God has given His Church, since the first Pentecost, one language and few words. The words we have received in the Church will move us to daily repentance and forgiveness. They are found in the Biblical Hebrew, Aramiac, and Koine Greek of the Bible. Those words God's Church, for centuries, has reflected His Word to Him in the Faith, in as many languages into which they have been translated. That became as the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. He restored His Church to the language of the Faith. That was proclaimed through all the languages in which the Good News of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension were heard on the first New Covenant Pentecost Feast Day.

Since then, in every generation, the faithful descendants of Noah's faithful family, the One Language of the Faith (for the Writings, Psalms and Prophets point to Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins) has been proclaimed, heard, believed and lived. In the Church, gathered around God's Word and Sacraments, Faith's Language has been delivered to sinners in order to turn them from their sins and to grant them, to gift to you, God's forgiveness.

This is most clearly done through His Church's public orders, rites, creeds, hymns, prayers, confessions and sermons. The faithful Christian, in any age, of any language, when he or she attends the Lord's services in any other land, spoken, chanted or sung in any unfamiliar language, can still know that which is being proclaimed if the one-language of the Church is declared. The language of the Church has a life of its own.

(For example: do you truly listen when this congregation recites the Creed or the Our Father? If so, you will find your voice matching the pace of the One Voice of the Body of Christ). Those who bear the Name of God, who speak any dialect, should be able

to discern when, in the Lord's Services, sins are being confessed/absolved, Psalms chanted, Kyrie and Gloria sung, and so forth.

God, Who has ever revealed Himself to be the God of order, God Whose Name is above all Names, reveals in today's text that which happens when those who speak the one language of the Church attempt to make a name for themselves. In the Church of St. Noah's day, we behold that which God will do in every generation. That is, by His grace, He will bring down those who will to make a name for themselves above His Name. He does so that those who are faithful to His Name might be lifted up. We return to hearing the Word of God through Moses, Shem, and Noah as we learn again about the unfaithful in the Church of one language and few words long ago:

And men's migration had come from the East and they found (a) plain in land of Shinar, and they settled there.⁴

As we heard earlier, Noah and his family had been called by God to be fruitful and fill the earth. Yet, they who had descended from the mountains, had found a wide and fertile plan. That is the land which is even now between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers – they stopped going into the whole world.

The New Testament Church did the same thing when they remained in Jerusalem after the first Pentecost and the reception of the Holy Spirit. They stayed where it was comfortable and familiar. They had to be driven forth into the wider world (to be found again faithful to the one language of the Church) by human persecution.

Did you grasp the parallel in all that to that which happened at the end of today's Old Covenant narrative? If not, repent and be more attentive to the Word of God. He knew you would have times like this, and, even so, He died to bring you forgiveness that you might hear anew His Word of grace. The Word and the Spirit declare what happens when those in the Church do not return to the revealed Word of God, as Genesis records:

Then they said, (a) man to their friend, "Come, let us make bricks for brick, and burn them thoroughly," and for the brick for stone and asphalt was between them for

⁴ Genesis 11:2

mortar.⁵ And they said, "Come, let us build for us (a) city and (a) tower with its head in (the) heavens, and let us make for us (a) Name, lest we be scattered abroad upon (the) face of all the earth."⁶

We have no need this day to learn more about ancient city and tower building techniques. What we do need to hear concerns the temptation that those who are self-satisfied in their lives, homes and work may fall into. From that text, we learn that which self-exalting ones in the Church did, and will do. That is, they lift up their thoughts, words, plans, deeds and works to give themselves precedence over the Word of God.

Conservatively estimating the number of people in the one Church of that era, they consisted of about 25,000 souls. They were comprised of six generations of Noah's family. They were content to not fill the earth, but to remain in place, to have the good life. They were a Church that did not desire to reach out and carry with themselves the Good News of God's grace into the world. They were fully curved into themselves.

They missed the will of God. His Word was not just for them in that place. They were to go out into the world – to bear the Word in troubles trials and sufferings, as well as in good and plentiful plains. They were a congregation determined to build only for themselves, and to not leave the true divine legacy for their descendants – the Word carried in the faithful into the whole fallen creation. They were like a Church in a given place that would give up training workers for the Lord's harvest to focus all their attention on building a name for themselves in their community.

This congregation is not collectively at that point. Your pastors pray that we not even start to draw near to that kind of thinking. To keep us from that, we receive readings such as those today to hold us in the balance between self and others. We will hear the stewardship readings of the first three post-Trinity Sundays. Balance continues to be declared through texts which contain a warning of God's wrath and the comfort of His grace. That the ancient Noahic Church had, and that they refused to hear.

⁵ Genesis 11:3

⁶ Genesis 11:4

Even so, as they did that which they willed to do, their collective conscience troubled them. They had, in deciding to remain in place in the Plain, declared their own punishment for transgressing God's call to fill the earth. They worried that they might actually be held to God's Word, and *be scattered abroad upon (the) face of all the earth!*

We may learn from that, that, for a time, the words, work and tasks of the unfaithful in the Church may overshadow those of faithful, repentant and forgiven sinners' humble requests offered before the Face of God. Even so, there is a sign of God's grace for the Church. It is beheld when He quickly rebukes the unrepentant, whose desires are, in effect, persecuting the faithful in their prayers.

Today's reading from the first Book of Moses declares that which God did swiftly to correct the sinners who were to be in His Church. They were to learn that His wrath need not again be poured out upon them. The hand of Moses records that which took place about 150 years from the Flood, at a time when Noah still had 200 years yet to live in this fallen creation (And some of us are troubled by the sins of our descendants! Thank God we, at most, live just over 100 years. We can but imagine the pain of beholding six generations departing from God's Word in our families). The Word says:

And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.⁷

There is a significant parallel to that which God did thousands of years later. God, beholding people in His Church sinning unrepentantly, came down to be with them. He beheld them in their sins.

When did that far greater descent of God to turn sinners from their sins take place? (In the Incarnation, Life, and Death of Jesus the Son of God).

God ever wills, since the year He poured out His full wrath on the human race, to take on Himself the punishment His Church deserves for all the times she glorifies and exalts ourselves over and against Him. Genesis shows God's grace for His sinning people as it declares:

⁷ Genesis 11:5

Then YHWH caused to say, “Behold, one people and one language for all they have. And this is the beginning of all they will do, and now (is it) not possible for them all things which they purpose to be doing?”⁸

God knows the evil into which His people, in His Church, may descend. He had, a century and a half before, removed all the evil from the earth. He had shown grace in saving eight. In them was the pure Word. They had, in the first generation of the saved, begun to fall away. Now, five generations later, they were headed where their drowned ancestors had gone—into the depths. In love for them, God acted:

“Come, let us go down and confuse there their language so they may not understand (a) man (the) speech of another’s.” Then YHWH scattered them abroad from there upon (the) face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.⁹

By coming down, by confusing their languages, God prevented His Church then from falling into greater sins that would have led to their destruction. God showed His glory in removing from men their self-glorification. His revealed will for them was accomplished. Our text concludes with the reality of God’s grace for sinners, as it says:

Therefore, (the) Name of the city is called Babel, for there YHWH confused (the) language of all the earth, and from there YHWH caused to scatter (them) upon (the) face of all the earth.¹⁰

Those who would have made a Name for themselves with a city and a tower, receive a name for the city. It is word-play in the Hebrew, Babel for Balal, “confused.” Later, the name of the city was, Babylon, though its residents then called it, Bab-ili, the “Gate of God.” Much later, the Church is reminded that a city that bears the name Babylon will one day experience His full wrath. Until then, the Church scattered abroad carries this news of God’s grace into the whole world: He still comes down to earth to save sinners from their sins.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Pentecost (LSB One-year series)

Psalms 143; Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:23-31

June 4, 2017

⁸ Genesis 11:6

⁹ Genesis 11:7-8

¹⁰ Genesis 11:9

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Soli Deo Gloria

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And men's migration had come from the East and they found (a) plain in land of Shinar, and they settled there.¹²

Then they said, (a) man to their friend, "Come, let us make bricks for brick, and burn them thoroughly," and for the brick for stone and asphalt was between them for mortar.¹³

And they said, "Come, let us build for us (a) city and (a) tower with its head in (the) heavens, and let us make for us (a) Name, lest we be scattered abroad upon (the) face of all the earth."¹⁴

And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.¹⁵

Then YHWH caused to say, "Behold, one people and one language for all they have. And this is the beginning of all they will do, and now (it is) not possible for them all things which they purpose to be doing."¹⁶

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¹¹ *Genesis 11:1*

¹² *Genesis 11:2*

¹³ *Genesis 11:3*

¹⁴ *Genesis 11:4*

¹⁵ *Genesis 11:5*

¹⁶ *Genesis 11:6*

¹⁷ *Genesis 11:7*

¹⁸ *Genesis 11:8*

¹⁹ *Genesis 11:9*