

Genesis 11:1-9 ~ Acts 2:1-24, 32-33, 36-47

Not Drunk

Day of Pentecost ~ Communion ~ Receiving of New Members ~ June 5, 2022

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Introduction to Pentecost Reading:

Remember the Rainbow covenant of God with Noah? The story Tracy read from Genesis 11 is the very next story after the Flood, after the Rainbow covenant. When God made the unilateral promise to Noah: No more floods no matter what. No matter how badly humans ever behave again. God set the rainbow in the clouds to be a sign of the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature on the earth, from Noah on. That's right: all the way From Noah to our FPC Rainbow Pride Poles and beyond. God with us, no matter how far off the mark we humans may get.

Well, the very next thing they did was build a very tall tower. They wanted to protect, to insulate, to isolate: "to make a name for themselves." Fortified by this tower, they could Edge God Out (EGO) and forget about their divine call to care for all of God's creation. They decided it would work best to become all one tribe that demanded uniformity, conformity. "Us against the world." And God would have none of it. God scattered and confused those tower inhabitants. For God's design depended upon biodiversity and cultural diversity. This ancient story, told from parent to child around the campfire, helped to explain this truth.

Sadly, sinfully, this "Tower of Babel" story has been misinterpreted and misused to justify laws that absolutely *contradict* the truth it is pointing to. This story was used in 1896 by the USA Supreme court as biblical justification to legalize the separation of races in our country. About fifty years later, the Tower of Babel story was used in 1948 by the government in South Africa to set up its segregationist policies known as apartheid. But this is *not* the meaning of this ancient story. It's actually the exact opposite. What happened in Shinar, shines the very first, dawning light on God's design and intention for God's creation: a beautiful, horizontal, wildly colorful and diverse world of creatures (including humans) with multiple languages, cultures, shapes, and identities all interdependent and interwoven. This is the world that God so loved. Enough to become one of us. A human, man named Jesus.

And Jesus, is why we are gathered here today in this sanctuary and remotely, on this Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. You are about to hear our story of how the Holy Spirit came to reveal the glory of God in an awesome and terrifying way. People speaking different languages and all feeling understood and accepted, no matter how different. What got into those people? They must be drunk, right?

Communion Meditation:

Raise your hand if you remember the company "Blockbuster Video"? The first Blockbuster store opened in 1985 in Dallas, Texas, with an inventory of 8,000 VHS and 2,000 Beta tapes. (Children, ask your parents what VHS and Beta tapes were.) Well, this idea to rent videos for people to play at home took off like every small business person's dream. In just two

years they had opened 19 stores, and in another two years, they were opening a new store every 24 hours, becoming a multibillion-dollar company by 1998. At its peak in 2004, Blockbuster had more than 9,000 stores worldwide. Bob and I, raising our two daughters in the 90's and 00's, we fondly remember trekking over to Blockbuster at least two or three times a week. So many movies to choose from. What a thrill to no longer be bound by a TV or movie theater schedule. We could watch shows any time we wanted. That was fun. The late fees, forgetting to watch them in time, not so fun. However, by 2018 Blockbuster had shrunk from 9,000 to nine stores, eight of which closed that year. And now in 2022, the company is history.

What happened to Blockbuster? Did people stop wanting to watch movies, or play video games at home? Far from it. The original core idea and concept was *not* Blockbuster's problem. Along came Netflix, new business models, and new technologies. People love to watch content on demand. Failing to change with advances in technology dealt the deathblow to Blockbuster and its royal blue with bold gold letters, ticket-shaped logo.ⁱ

What about the church? How are we doing at shining with the glory of God's Love for all people. How are we doing at blazing the path towards justice with deep compassion, abiding grace, speaking the truth in Love? It's a good thing we love to do Rummage Sales here at FPC. As you heard, once again, thanks to the countless hours of numerous volunteers, once again we raised significant funds from junk and got it all cleaned and boxed up in a couple of hours yesterday. As Phyllis Tickle taught us in her book *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, "every 500 years since Pentecost, the church has gone through a major rummage sale, where we shake loose from traditions, doctrines, practices that no longer serve us or the Good News of Christ Jesus. In 1517 it came to be known as the Protestant Reformation.

Unlike Blockbuster video, we are still here. Approximately 2.38 billion people practice some form of Christianity globally today, over 2,000 years since Christ was raised from the dead, and the Holy Spirit came with wind and flame 50 days later. Nearly one third of the world's population identifies as Christ followers. But 500 years since the Protestant Reformation, how are we really doing at shining with the glory of God's compassion and Love for all people, of all generations, no matter their station, status, or what language they speak?

"Bewildered, amazed and astonished." Did you catch that? The people who were in Jerusalem that day, but *not* at church, not attending the traditional Pentecost, Festival of Weeks, 50 days after Passover. The people who had not gathered, but were on the outside, heard the peculiar sound and light show and came running. They were bewildered, amazed, and astonished. Let's think for a moment: *What amazes and astonishes people about the witness of the church today?* If you think about it, it's not good.ⁱⁱⁱ We are guilty of being hypocritical, judgmental, arrogant. We are guilty of being closed. And of falling victim to partisan politics. We are also guilty of looking a lot more like the people who built the Tower of Babel: all speaking the same language, all looking the same; expecting uniformity. Rather than the people in Jerusalem on Pentecost, together in one place from the entire table of nations, understanding one another in the midst of the differences. The Pentecost phenomenon was not a reversal of

Babel, but a fulfillment of God's vision of diverse peoples listening and understanding one another.

At our church officer training last week, I posed the question, "*How does the church presently fall short of what Christ intends the church to be?*" I was moved by the courage and candor of their responses. Several at the table and on zoom lamented how miserably we are failing to reach, not just young people, but even those who are fifty and under. Where are they? Not in our pews, and probably not online. We know they too, are hungry and thirsty for the love of Christ, for authentic community. They yearn to make a better world. How are we failing to shine with God's glory in a way that invites them to want to come and see? It was an important frank conversation. One we will continue.

Did you know that Millennials (young adults who are currently 26-41 years old) are more likely to have at least one tattoo, than to attend church regularly? I just discovered this statistic a few days ago. So I got to thinking... we already have a parlor. Maybe we should convert it into a tattoo parlor on Sunday mornings... Just kidding. But we need to think about the people who are not here. What their outlook, hopes, dreams, needs may be. What story they have told themselves about the world. These are important conversations I hear Holy Spirit calling us to have together.

Just to be clear: It's *not* about strategy. As legendary management consultant Peter Drucker has famously said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast." It's not really about adding a screen in the sanctuary or an espresso bar in our Narthex. It's about letting the Holy Spirit blow through us with new ways of listening and understanding people of all generations, backgrounds and temperaments. It's about being a culture that lets Holy Spirit power break through the barriers and towers of social dysfunction preventing us from stemming the epidemic of mass shootings, systemic poverty, and structural racism.

Where people turn away, God welcomes. Where we are tempted to judge, God calls us to love. Let us hear the call to live according to the Spirit. Let us shock and amaze and astonish others with Holy Spirit wind and fire. No, we are not drunk, we may appear to be acting strangely as we let the Holy Spirit bust through and break down barriers that seem intractable. When Christ shows up, when the Spirit of God shows up, people who speak different languages begin to hear and understand one another. What tongue, what language, what person or people do you need to understand better, today? Bring that person in your heart to the communion table this day. Breathe in and bathe them with love, the love of Jesus.

Come, Holy Spirit. Let today be our Pentecost. Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/pentecostc/#Acts2>, Blockbuster Video illustration raised as an aside.

ⁱⁱ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), pp. 19-31.

ⁱⁱⁱ www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/847-day-of-pentecost-c-june-5-2022, The Rev. Dr. Joy J. Moore made this striking point during this podcast recorded live at the Festival of Homiletics I attended on Study Leave.