

The Day of Pentecost, June 9, 2019

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God Came Down

Acts 2:1–21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

WHEN THE DAY OF PENTECOST ARRIVED, the disciples WERE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE. . . . AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK . . . (Acts 2:1, 4).

For better or worse—and mostly it’s for worse—we live in the social media age. With Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, LinkedIn, Google+, WhatsApp, and who knows what else, you can “connect” with anyone anywhere at any time about anything, or nothing. And still, we’re lonelier than ever. More isolated physically and emotionally. Feeling lost in the vastness of cyberspace. You can find out what your second-cousin twice removed ate for dinner last night in the North End (and it was probably *way* better than what you had), but how well do you know the real, live person who lives next door to you? Social media often leaves us *less* connected to each other in real ways.

Then there’s the way it drains our time and energy, distracts us, encourages us to make comparisons with others, breeds miscommunication, confusion, and hurt, and becomes a gateway to sin and vice. Have you noticed how often people say or do things online they would never say or do in real life? And with so much information and so many different opinions out there, and everything being called “fake news,” it sure is hard to figure out what’s true or whom to believe. Worst of all, however, we suffer from spiritual loneliness, miscommunication, and confusion. No social media app, web site, or tower can link us to God, make us holy, or give our lives meaning and purpose.

3.

How in the world did we get so fragmented? Well, what happened in the Garden of Eden didn’t stay in the Garden of Eden. Sin got into the DNA of Adam and Eve, their children, and their grandchildren. Like a stone thrown into a pond, the ripples spread through time. Cain murdered Abel. Later God saw that EVERY INCLINATION OF THE THOUGHTS OF THE HUMAN HEART WAS ONLY EVIL ALL THE TIME (Gen 6:5 NIV). Then came the tower of Babel. When THE WHOLE EARTH HAD ONE LANGUAGE AND THE SAME WORDS, people said, “COME, LET’S BUILD

OURSELVES A CITY AND A TOWER WITH ITS TOP IN THE HEAVENS, AND LET'S MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES, LEST WE BE SCATTERED OVER THE FACE OF THE WHOLE EARTH" (Gen 11:1, 4). How arrogant! They wanted to ascend into heaven, to be like God, to get for themselves the glory and honor that belong to Him alone. He had commanded them to multiply and fill the earth. They rebelled. They began to build a tower, a monument to themselves, a temple to wickedness. And God knew where it was headed: THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF WHAT THEY WILL DO (Gen 11:6). With a common language, their rebellion, arrogance, sin, and evil would only get worse and worse.

He wouldn't let it continue. He came down and mercifully put an end to their folly. He confused their language. He separated and scattered them over the face of the earth. No longer were they one people with one language; now they were many peoples with different languages, divided and opposed to each other. God sowed confusion so they would be brought to repentance.

We live after Babel. Loss of community, loneliness, communication issues, and confusion aren't new to the social media age. They're problems as old as sin and they can't be fixed by any technology. They're aftershocks from the tower of Babel. The human community is fractured and divided from itself and from God. Not even Facebook can put it back together again. Just think how often we view people with suspicion because of their language, skin color, cultural background, economic status, or political views. But even where all these things are the same, we still find people divided from one another—husbands and wives, parents and children, former best friends.

We can't undo the tower of Babel—the distrust and confusion between people or the lack of fear, love, and trust in God. Yet we long for restored relationships, for a real community and good communication and true knowledge and, most of all, for God.

2.

Now God had a plan when He confused their language and scattered the people at Babel. His plan was to reunite and again gather all people. To bring them back from sin and evil, from separation and death. To restore their communion with Himself and with each other.

God didn't just leave the world spinning off in confusion. He came down again. In the fullness of time, He came with flesh. The Word who was with God, the Word who was God, and the Word by whom all things were created—that Word, the Son of God, was made man and born of the virgin Mary. He came down to live with humanity, to live

for humanity. Instead of leaving us to seek our own connection with God or to follow our own misguided spirituality, when the human race was lost, scatted, and condemned, He came down as the true Word of God for a lost and condemned world.

He came down to the cross because He loves the Father, and the Father sent His Son to the cross because He loves you. His death shows God's love for us, His desire to seek and to save the lost. We love Him because He first loved us.

Jesus said, "IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE'LL KEEP MY WORD, AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM, AND WE WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH HIM. WHOEVER DOESN'T LOVE ME DOESN'T KEEP MY WORDS. AND THE WORD THAT YOU HEAR ISN'T MINE BUT THE FATHER'S WHO SENT ME" (Jn 14:23-24). This isn't a request or a command for us to love Him. It's spoken to those who already *do* love Him as a gift and promise. To the disciples and to each of you who love Jesus, even if your love is often poor, weak, and half-hearted. His gifts are in His word, and we KEEP that word because we love Him, like a bride holds on to the words of her beloved husband. We KEEP that word by hearing it, holding to it, treasuring its sweetness, striving to do what it says, and believing its promises.

And what does the word say? Jesus says that the Father loves you. He promises that He and the Father will come to you. He promises that they will remain and abide with you. They will even make their home with you. And all this will take place, Jesus says, by the Holy Spirit. Before "THE HELPER, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME, HE WILL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS AND BRING TO YOUR REMEMBRANCE ALL THAT I'VE SAID TO YOU" (Jn 14:26). Jesus promised Pentecost—the gift, the coming down of the Holy Spirit.

What Jesus promised has taken place and is taking place. The Holy Spirit has come down, still comes down, and will continue to come down until the end of the age. He teaches all things about Jesus. He helped the disciples remember what Jesus had said and done. He inspired them to write the very words of Holy Scripture, the New Testament. And now, today, the Holy Spirit continues to come down and work through that word. He shows us our sin, and He shows us our Savior.

This is how God responds to the problems caused by Babel. He comes down with a word for all people. He speaks to us by His Son, and it's translated and communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guarantees that the communication is true, not confused. That it has everything necessary for our salvation. That it delivers Christ. And the Holy Spirit through the word brings us out of loneliness and isolation into the community of the Father and the Son and so into communion with the Church. But

there is a warning: whoever neglects and refuses the word does not have the Holy Spirit, is separated from salvation, and has no fellowship with God or the Church.

1.

The Day of Pentecost reverses what happened with the tower of Babel. WHEN THE DAY OF PENTECOST ARRIVED, the disciples WERE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE. AND SUDDENLY THERE CAME FROM HEAVEN A SOUND LIKE A MIGHTY RUSHING WIND, AND IT FILLED THE ENTIRE HOUSE WHERE THEY WERE SITTING. AND DIVIDED TONGUES AS OF FIRE APPEARED TO THEM AND RESTED ON EACH ONE OF THEM. AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER TONGUES AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE (vv 1–4). And their speech wasn't confused or unintelligible. They were telling THE MIGHTY WORKS OF GOD in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus (v 11) to a multitude of DEVOUT MEN FROM EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN (v 5). The work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit is for all people.

What happened that day is repeated this day all around the world—people from every corner of the earth hear proclaimed to them in their own tongues the mighty works of God in Jesus, just like you do. By this word, the Holy Spirit gathers us and these scattered people into one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church and enlightens us and them in the true faith. One Spirit, one Lord Jesus Christ, one message of forgiveness, one faith, though it's heard by many people in many different languages.

*TODAY THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES DOWN
AND CALLS, GATHERS, ENLIGHTENS, AND SANCTIFIES
US AND THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON EARTH, FORGIVES OUR SINS,
AND KEEPS US WITH JESUS CHRIST IN THE ONE TRUE FAITH.*

For the Holy Spirit breaks through the confusion and miscommunication of this world. He pierces the loneliness and isolation of our hearts. He brings the good news of Jesus into distant and dark corners of the world and of our hearts and minds. Wherever God's word is, the word of Jesus and His forgiveness, the Holy Spirit is there too, always present and always working. He restores true life. Now in forgiveness we live together with one another and with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Hidden, yet real unity and real communion in the body of Jesus Christ, the Church, through the Spirit who has been poured out on us. There's nothing else like it in the world, and there never will be.

Social media is no substitute for real communion, for the real place where the real God comes down and really communicates His real love to us, and gives real life to sinners. Thank God for the Holy Spirit, and for the Church that He creates!

Now you are temples of the Holy Spirit, sent back into the world, with a message for your second-cousin twice removed and a word of encouragement to the person who lives next door to you. You are witnesses of Jesus Christ. You have what others long for, what others need, so speak boldly and confidently of Jesus, your beloved Lord, of the Father who sent Him in love, and of the Holy Spirit who called you by the Gospel and keeps you still in this faith, and who will raise us on the Last Day and give eternal life to us and to all who believe in Christ.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

*Revised from a sermon preached for the Day of Pentecost in 2013
at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana.*