

IN NOMINE JESU

UNITED IN THE ONE LANGUAGE OF THE FAITH

Hear again the Word of God for this Feast of the Pentecost, fifty days after the Church celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord, and ten days after the Ascension of our Lord, as God promises through the words recorded by Moses:

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

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

Today, all around the world, the Church celebrates a Great Reversal. She remembers the day when God confused the language of mankind, and the day when God restored one language for the faithful. The Pentecost Feast means that Christians understand that all true Christians speak God's one language of salvation through repeating the inspired Word of God which declares forever that:

- God came down among men to see our sinfulness.
- God among us took our wretchedness upon Himself.
- God in our flesh, Jesus, bore our sins into death.
- Jesus Christ, true God, conquered death, the devil and the world for us.
- Jesus rose from the death because of our justification.
- Jesus ascended into the heavens to rule in all power and authority, placing our flesh at its intended place from the beginning of creation.
- Jesus, One with the Father, pours out the Holy Spirit, true God, upon those who hear the Word.

¹ Genesis 11:1.

- God works Jesus' faith in people, granting them the Holy Spirit through the means He chose, the Water and Word of Holy Baptism, as He did most recently among us for little Patrick and James.
- United with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the hearers of the Word who do not reject His truths confess Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of their sins.
- All believers, holding firm to the revealed Truth of the Word, through the working of the Holy Spirit, are united by God in the language of the Faith, simply:

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.²

Christians who would cling to the Word of God in truth, over the early centuries of the Faith's spread, struggled over, and eventually agreed upon, the three great ecumenical Creeds. In those words, recited here in one form or another every Sunday, Wednesday, Feast Day, and any other time we can find reason to hold a service of the Word, the faithful confess with the language of the Faith that unites, the revealed truths of God. Those guided rightly, that is by the power of God the Holy Spirit, confess

²Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

that God, for His Name's sake, unites those in common confession that were born without faith, eternal blessed life, and the forgiveness of sins. This He does by showing them, you, Christ-crucified, who then leads you to the Father. God has united the language of His called people into His confession of salvation. In so doing, God has reversed the confusion man's sin brought to him when he decided, as one people, to make a Name for himself, and thereby to reject the Name of God! Our Old Testament text began:

And all the earth had one language and few words.³

Those words recount the time of the ancient descendant of our father Noah, Peleg. He was born some 100 years after the Flood which destroyed all flesh save the eight people in the Ark. His was the sixth generation after the Flood. Conservative estimates hold that there were approximately 25,000 people on earth when man decided to make a Name for himself before heaven.

Six generations were all it took for mankind to reject the Name of their God who had saved their ancestor Noah and his family from the Flood that covered the whole of the earth.⁴ It some of them still knew father Noah. Only 150 or so years had passed: according to our dating, Noah was still alive! (He lived 350 years after the Flood).⁵

How soon people forget the grace of God in providing His call to repentance and salvation to those who believe. This should not be difficult for us to understand. How many of our family members - children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren - have

³ Genesis 11:1.

departed the true confession of the Faith in our lifetimes? This is not because God willed them to fall from the Faith. It is because they willed to reject His gifts of mercy, forgiveness, life and salvation, in themselves hoping to stand on their own confessions. Those who have been saved by grace through faith can reject that faith, grace and salvation. That is a sad reality, but it is necessary, for God desires that His people respond to His love freely, not by some kind of irresistible grace.

Those who have not rejected the salvation declared in the Word, and worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit, can know that they are among those who are united in the common confession of the Faith as they, you, continue to receive God's gifts. This unity of confession transcends feelings of being saved, for those can be fleeting. Unity of confession ascends to the knowledge of God's revealed mysteries. What this means is that believers are united in the one language of the Faith. Just so, we return to the day's text:

And all the earth had one language and few words.⁶

Here is a lesson for the faithful today. Those who stop relying on God for their salvation, who reject the continual hearing of the Word of God, will turn from God and try to lift themselves up before Him. The ancients, in today's narrative, are our examples of what not to do! After the Flood, God had commanded them to,

be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.⁷

⁴ cf. Luke 3:34.

⁵ Genesis 9:28.

⁶ Genesis 11:1.

⁷ Genesis 9:7.

Nowhere in those words is a command to sit in one place and build a Name for themselves. The word choice is clear, it is a reiteration of the intent of the command given to our first father Adam. In the case of mankind's God-granted re-start, it held the clear meaning that the faithful were to go into creation to make themselves, and it, bring forth good and life. But, man's fallen nature, without the fullness of the indwelling of God, is to do what we think best, and to re-interpret God's Word to meet our felt needs, or humanly reasonable thoughts, rather than conforming ourselves to that Word. Even those who are united in God's faith still struggle with Adam's sinful desire to make ourselves equal to God. That, by the way, is the major sin revealed in our day's text. It continues:

And men's migration had come from the East and they found (a) plain in land of Shinar, and they settled there.⁸

The migration of the family of Noah is described using specific geographic terms. Coming down out of the mountainous regions where the Ark had come to ground, they found a great and wide plain. This was not a mere valley, but the broad fertile plain near the rivers we now call Tigris and Euphrates. Here there was, and is, plenty of rich soil. Crops would flourish, and the descendants of Noah could make for themselves nice lives. The thinking surely ran along these lines, "Well, we've left the mountains, here is a very nice place, we met God's intent, even if we don't take His command literally," and out of reasoning like that our text continues:

⁸ Genesis 11:2.

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.⁹ 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."¹⁰

Speaking one language, the language of man which builds up man, the descendants of Noah to the sixth generation decided to make their own place of safety, security and prosperity. And, just so God would know that they meant to stay, and that they believed they had interpreted His Word rightly for themselves, they corporately decided to build not just a city, but a tower into the heavens to glorify their decision and accomplishments! Recall what 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."¹¹

The motivation there was human pride. It was coupled with insecurity about God's fulfilling His promises. They were to be the people of God, of the family of the faithful rescued by God from sin through the waters of the Flood. How like them we are! How much do the sons and daughters of the Faith still need God to come down and rescue us from ourselves? That is what is happening in our text for us to behold, that we might repent and receive the forgiveness of our sins and remain united in the one language of the Faith as God comes down to us in Water and Word, Holy Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

⁹ *Genesis 11:3.*

¹⁰ *Genesis 11:4.*

¹¹ *Genesis 11:4.*

God does not intend to leave those He has rescued from sin in their sins.

Moses, in this day's reading, gives a foreshadowing of God's direct involvement in saving sinning people from committing greater sins. Our text continues:

And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.¹²

God, knowing man's propensity to sin against His Word, against His Person, and against His saving Name, takes action. For our ancestors – and we each might, if we had all the records, tie our family trees back to Noah and his wife – this meant coming among them in order to prevent them from exalting themselves over Him, and thus falling into complete rejection of His Name and earning for themselves eternal perdition.

Therefore, God, in the fullness of time, came down among His sinning people, the descendants of the sinners in the Plain of Shinar, to take away their pride, their insecurity, and their self-made means for eternal security and salvation. Much later, as you dear ones in Christ know, He actually came down to become one with us. God knows our fallen nature, for it was placed upon Him, though He Himself never sinned. He willed to take on Himself the punishment we deserved for glorifying and fortifying ourselves over and against Him. Those realities are foreshadowed with these words:

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?"¹³

¹² Genesis 11:5.

¹³ Genesis 11:6.

Thank God He did not just destroy those sinners with the fire that is coming. If He had, you and I would not be here today. They did not receive what their sins deserved that you would be able to be united with Him in the one language of the Faith. That is also why God has not yet brought down the final cleansing fire of His glory upon our 21st century world. God's will is to bring to salvation all the sons and daughters of the rescued Noah. So, He delays, using words rather than the promised fire, sending His Holy Spirit to call people into repentance, forgiveness, faith, and everlasting life. That is what you are called to discern from these words:

*"Come, let us go down and confuse there their language so they may not understand (a) man (the) speech of another's."*¹⁴

The reality of God's salvation for the thousands in the Plain of Shinar does not end there. He does not confuse the united language just so people will not build their city and tower of glory. Rather, He gives them many tongues without translation then so that they would fulfill His will that they fill the earth and multiply and bring forth good fruit from the creation! God's restoration of His plan is clearly revealed as Moses has written:

*Then YHWH scattered them abroad from there upon (the) face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.*¹⁵

When man wills to place his Name above the Name of God, to recreate God in his image, God acts. His will is done, and what the descendants of Noah feared, because of their lack of faith, came true. Truly they had nothing to fear. For God, when

¹⁴ Genesis 11:7.

He gives His command, wills to bring good from it. When humans sin, God comes down to behold the sin, to wrest it from them, and to fix that which man has broken. That we recall as we remain united in His One confession, through the working of His Spirit who has come down to us to lead us to Christ, and from Christ to the Father.

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

Pentecost (LSB One-year series)

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

May 31, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

TRANSLATION, 2ND DRAFT

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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.¹⁸

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And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.²⁰

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."²¹

¹⁵ Genesis 11:8.

¹⁶ Genesis 11:1.

¹⁷ Genesis 11:2.

¹⁸ Genesis 11:3.

¹⁹ Genesis 11:4.

²⁰ Genesis 11:5.

²¹ Genesis 11:6.

“Come, let us go down and confuse there their language so they may not understand (a) man (the) speech of another’s.”²²

Then YHWH scattered them abroad from there upon (the) face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.²³

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.²⁴

²² *Genesis 11:7.*

²³ *Genesis 11:8.*

²⁴ *Genesis 11:9.*