

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**

**May 19, 2013**

**Genesis 11:1-19**

*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.*

*They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."*

*But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."*

*So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

Have you ever built something which gives you a sense of accomplishment? Maybe it is going to the beach and building a sand castle. Maybe it is working in the garden and planting vegetables or flowers in it. Maybe it is working at Marinette Marine and building one of the gigantic ships which are built there. Maybe it is something else and I haven't named it, but you get the idea because we love the feeling of accomplishment we get from building something.

All of these things which I listed are things which we build that are good and God pleasing because they bring us enjoyment, food or employment. But could it be possible to build something which isn't God pleasing? Our lesson today talks about people being proud of something they have built. However, unlike the things which I listed before, the people in our lesson wanted to build something which wasn't God pleasing.

"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'"

At first it might seem this is a harmless wish and desire. These people wanted to build a great city which had a huge tower in the middle of it. You might ask yourself, "What made this urge to build this city and tower ungodly?" We need to go back to the flood which God sent upon the earth a few chapters earlier in Genesis. God sent the flood on the earth because the earth had become filled with wickedness and he wanted to destroy the wickedness he saw on earth by means of the flood.

After the flood God gave Noah and his family this command, "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands.'" God wanted Noah and his descendants to go out and fill the earth up with people, but how did his descendants respond?

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Noah's descendants refused to listen to God's command. They knew God wanted them to spread out over all the earth, but they didn't like this idea. They wanted to build a monument to themselves. They wanted to build something which all people from all time would look at and say, "Wow. Those people were incredible. Look at this tower they built. It reaches all the way to the heavens. They must've been some people."

How did God react to this desire? "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this,

then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.’ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.”

The Lord expressed judgment on them because they were building a monument to themselves. He changed the people’s language and this change drove them apart from each other and this driving apart fulfilled God’s command to fill all the earth. Why did God change their language? He changed their language because of their sinful pride. These people wanted to feed their pride and build a monument to themselves rather than build God’s monument the church.

But what about us? What kind of a monument would we want to build? Would you rather build a monument to yourself or build God’s church? I would think we all would all readily answer, “Build God’s church. We talked about witnessing about Jesus last week and how sharing our faith builds God’s church. I’ve looked for opportunities and chances to do it this last week to share my faith with others. I’ve tried to show Jesus to those who don’t know him.”

I would be happy with you if you did this because you were extending the efforts to build God’s kingdom. It does bring to mind one thought. Imagine you’ve just bought a house. You love the house, but you have a desire to keep adding on to it, and adding on, and adding on but you never stop and take care of the original part of the house because you are too busy adding on to the house. What would happen to the original part of the house? It would fall apart because you aren’t taken care of it.

What if we apply this illustration to our own lives once? What if our goal is to share Jesus with those who don’t know him, but we never stop to build ourselves up in our faith or build up those who already know Jesus. What will happen? Our spiritual house or the spiritual houses of others will fall apart because we’ve ignored them. What good would it do if I tell others about the love of Jesus, but don’t show love to my family in return?

What good would it do if I keep sharing my faith with others, but treat my fellow church member with anger and hostility because they said something to offend me? What good would it do if I encourage others to come to church or Bible study, but I’m rarely there myself? God would quickly see through our efforts. He would see they are efforts trying to build up our own ego and build a monument to ourselves rather than building up his church.

What kind of church does God want us to build? Jesus tells us in our gospel for today, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” God wants us to build up a church which testifies about his great love for us and how this love is for all people.

God wants us to testify to the truth and build up his church. He wants us to tell others how Jesus has transformed our lives with his gospel. He wants us to tell them how the Holy Spirit has brought us over from spiritual death to spiritual life and how we are alive in Christ because we trust Jesus has taken

away our sins and made us alive in him. He wants us to tell of how we once were slaves to sin, but now have been freed by Jesus' death and resurrection to live a life which is pleasing to God.

He wants us to share all of these things with others, but he doesn't want us to stop growing in our faith. Sometimes we can get caught up thinking the only way to build up the church is by adding others to the church, but God tells us this isn't the only way to build the church. We can build the church up by studying his word, which will build us up in our faith, so that we stay strong in our faith and we won't fall out of the church and encourage others who are struggling to stay in the church to stay in the church.

How does God accomplish this building of his church? He does it by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on his church. Our lesson today tells us about how God confused the languages of the peoples of the earth. "So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth."

Sinful pride forced God to bring different languages into this world, but look at how the Holy Spirit overcame those differences in our second lesson from today. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to speak in languages they had never known before and share the gospel with those who didn't know Jesus. This same Spirit enables us to use the gifts God has given us to build his church. What do these gifts look like? Perhaps you are a good listener who can simply be there for a Christian brother or sister who is having a hard time right now.

Maybe you are a strong encourager who can encourage your fellow Christian who is failing in their faith. Maybe you find it easy to talk to strangers about Jesus and you can do that. Maybe you have the ability to work with young children or have a soft heart for the shut in and you can share God's word with them. What should you do with the gifts the Holy Spirit gives you? Use them. Why? Because you will build God's church with them. Amen.