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St Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> St. SW  
Austin, MN, 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels  
sermon preached on-  
May 19, 2013  
Pentecost Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27

Hymns: 739; 236; 226; 313:3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Ascended Lord, Who promised the gift of  
the Spirit, dear fellow Redeemed

INTRO: “Pentecost”

When we think of this church festival of Pentecost our minds automatically go to those special events we read of in our scripture lesson this morning. The special outpouring of the Holy Spirit was very apparent to all who were gathered there in Jerusalem. The sound of a mighty rushing wind, the sign of the tongues of fire, the apostles suddenly speaking in languages they had not known or studied: these gifts were easily perceived. The greater gift was the changing of men’s hearts on that day! So many came to know and believe that Jesus was the Christ, their Savior from sin. These people marveled that they were hearing in their own tongues the wonderful works of God!

But there was also opposition to what the Apostles had to say. There were people present who ridiculed the Apostles and their preaching. They desired to discredit the preaching of the apostles as being nothing more than drunken babbling! Our text today takes us back a couple of thousand years. It takes us back to where all true babbling began, and indeed one might be surprised to learn that this confusion of tongues began as a work of God, even a **gracious** work of God. So, for our edification, the Spirit would lead us on this Pentecost day to a better understanding of -

**Theme: Babbling, Its Cause and Its Cure.**

Humans can be cruel. Many still might characterize other people as babbling when they talk, as the opposition did on Pentecost. Some may even be so uncharitable as to question the sobriety of others, when in fact they are simply speaking in their native tongue. I guess that is not so far removed from our own observations of the world. Increasingly we live in a multicultural world. It is certainly not uncommon for us to hear

a number of different languages spoken on the streets of Austin. And to those of us who are not fluent in the language being spoken it may indeed sound like unintelligible babbling, even though that is not the case at all. There are just so many different languages, and many sound so different from what we are used to hearing that they sound strange to our ears. The anthropologists of this world, many of whom have bought into the false theories of evolution, have their theories about how all these different languages came to be. They will also be quick to point out that many dialects have been lost in recent times, and there is not as much diversity in language now as there was a few hundred years ago.

Linguists who study the history of language in the world also make a point of how language has devolved. In spite of all the techno-babble that has been brought into language, over the centuries language has gotten simpler, less complex, with much less nuance than is apparent in the ancient languages of the earth. We have all this knowledge and still many think of the languages of the world as “babbling.”

Our text reveals the truth behind all this, and how these marvelously complex languages came into being. Our text takes us back to --

### **I. Where it all began.**

These events occurred perhaps only a century after the flood. The Lord had made His will clear to the children of Noah. Their descendents were to go out into the world and replenish the earth. Problems began because they resisted this express will of God for their lives. (Trouble is always the result when people resist the will of God.).

**Genesis 11:1-4** Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us

make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

Our text takes us back to that time when all people shared the same language, and lived in harmony with one another. That sounds wonderful! Indeed, when we read the plans and intents of the people it doesn't sound so evil, as long as one is willing to forget that their plans and intents were in direct opposition to the Lord's instruction for them. What we are reading about is defiance, and defiance in the first order. What we are reading is the evidence of the humanism that is so apparent in fallen mankind. They were determined to be the captains of their own fate, the directors of their own lives, the authority that would determine what is right for their own lives, and not subject to the law or rule of God. In their plans and in their behavior they were intent upon making a name for themselves, they were proceeding with seeking their own glory, not glorifying the name of God. This is where we find the source of confusion, and the beginning of the many different languages that would come into the world.

The Lord intervened. It was not simply a matter of the Lord determining that He was going to show them who was boss, and interfere and foil their plans just for the sake of spite. No, indeed! God saw where their plans and intents would lead. Yes, it was contrary to the express will of God, but it would also be to their own harm and loss. The will of God for mankind is not simply God doing whatever He happens to feel like doing in the moment. The Lord is not capricious in His ways, as man so often can be. The Lord had a plan, a plan which man opposed in spite of the fact that God's plan was for the salvation of a rebellious mankind. Man sets his course for destruction, though they may not realize that this is the case. God saw where things were going.

**Genesis 11: 5-6** But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the Lord said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

With the advantage of all people having the same language with free and open communication, how did mankind choose to make use of this blessing? They set a course for humanity that would lead to continued rebellion against God, departing further and further from His gracious good will for them, persistently defying God in their lives. What God saw was that this was only the beginning of an **organized** departure from the express will of God, and that the people would determine more goals and behavior to their own glory. Nothing would be denied them. The people wouldn't say "No, we ought not do that," to anything their evil hearts desired.

And so God stepped in. God intervened. God set limits to the evil that mankind would be allowed to fulfill in the pursuit of their vain ambition. So often people defend their unbelief with the proposition that if there was a loving God in heaven He would intervene and would not allow the evil and the pain and the cruelty of this world to go on. Little thought is given to the fact since we are all sinful, and that if this were done in the manner that the skeptics of this world propose we would all be subject to destruction. God deals with this sinful world according to His grace, with patience, seeking salvation for the lost sinner. It is to that end that God does intervene. When He allows mankind to proceed in their perverse and sinful ways, it reveals that it is man that is unloving and in desperate need for deliverance. When God does intervene it is for the advancement of His grace among us. And so we see the Lord intervene at Babel.

**Genesis 11:7-9** Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

God confused their language. People showed up to work on their precious tower, and the people they had worked so well with the day before could no longer understand them. They were babbling in their speech! God dispersed the peoples out into the

different regions of the world by instilling in them different sophisticated languages, but languages that presented a barrier to understanding one another. And so God thwarted the evil intent of man to defy God's will for them and to hinder God's plan for the world, including God's plan for or salvation.

It was the defiant pride found in the heart of man that was the cause of babbling in this world. Just as God intervened to bring this confusion of tongues, so we know the cure was found with God also. We go forward to Pentecost -

## **II. Where Babbling finds Resolution.**

As we consider again the wonders of grace that were apparent in Jerusalem on that Pentecost Day 2000 years ago, we are led to understand that the confusion of tongues at Babel was not a hindrance to the spread of the gospel, but a set up for this marvel of grace. God had indeed disrupted man's vain and prideful plans, but it was to keep the world on course for the greatest visitation of God among men. God came down from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ. He saw our desperate state, and the only begotten Son of God came down among us so that we might have life and salvation in His name. These things found their fulfillment in Jesus' sinless life as He fulfilled all righteousness for us, in His innocent sufferings and death through which He atoned for the sins of the world. He defeated death by rising from the grave. He returned to heaven above with His mission fully accomplished, having presented the Apostles with the promise of the Spirit's coming.

Then on Pentecost Day God overcame the confusion of tongues begun at Babel by granting His chosen Apostles the special gift to speak of His wondrous work in the many different languages of the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for that Pentecost festival. The message was so different from the boasting of Babel which was centered on the wonderful works of man. On Pentecost the people heard, in their own mother tongues, the disciples proclaiming to them **the wonderful works of God!** Instead of the many languages of Babel demonstrating God's superior power to thwart the sinful schemes of man, on Pentecost God used the many languages spoken by the apostles

to reveal His grace, and to demonstrate His desire for the peoples of all nations to know the truth of their salvation in Jesus Christ.

And so it is yet for us today. Now we hear the wonderful works of God in English, a language that didn't even exist on that Pentecost day. Our grandparents or great-grandparents heard these marvelous truths revealed in German or Norwegian, or Swedish. Now these marvelous truths are being presented in others lands in Telugu, or Nepalese, or Mandarin, or Swahili, or any number of other of the different dialects of the countries of Africa. This is in agreement with the will of God that the message of repentance and remission of sins in Christ Jesus be preached to all nations!

So then we rejoice in knowing, not just the **cause** of the babbling of Babel, but also its **cure**. The babbling of man is not found in mankind's different languages, but in the spiritual nonsense that flows from the sinful hearts of man. This babbling of sinful man finds its cure in the unfathomable grace and love of God who proclaims peace and salvation to us, the peoples of all lands and tongues through Christ Jesus our Lord.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.