

Genesis 11:1-9

Acts 2:1-11

The story of the tower of Babel in the book of Genesis is a primitive effort to supply reasons for the geographical and linguistic diversity of the peoples of the world.

The story should be taken seriously not as an historical document but rather for the lesson it teaches, the simple lesson that those who wish to “make a name for themselves” are already on the path towards forgetting that it is the Lord’s name alone that is to be honored.

The consequence of this is telling:

lest the people make too much of themselves, God confuses their language so that they are unable to communicate with each other and scatters them all over the earth.

This is not a theory that holds up well under anthropological inspection but its lesson survives the test:

**the source of human discord is rooted in pride
and the unity of human diversity will be reconciled only
in the name and in the city of God.**

A whole reversal of this dynamic appears in the Pentecost story in Acts.

Here, the same Lord who confused the language of Babel's builders
and scattered them about the earth
now inspires people from every place
and enables them to understand each others' language
gathering them together into the holy city of Jerusalem
whose name has come to be understood to mean, "city of peace."

What the scripture offers us here is not a history lesson
but rather a critique of how the peoples of the world live together,
- or fail to live together-
and the need for us to rely not on our own name,
much less on our efforts to make a name for ourselves,
but on the name of God and the Spirit God sends
to bring unity in the diversity
which history and human migration have inevitably introduced.

It would be good for us to consider what this lesson has to teach us
as parishes close and merge and people struggle
to live through the scattering parish closing brings
and to understand the parochial "language"
of the communities with whom they are joined;
good for us to study the lesson of Babel and Pentecost
as we debate legislation for immigration reform
and how we welcome or turn away those of a different tongue
who have been scattered by poverty and oppression;

good for us to pray over these scriptures

**in a time when some call diversity a curse
and others call it a blessing;**

**good for us to let the scriptures' truth penetrate and permeate us
as we find ourselves at war,
and in a war with religious differences as old as faith itself.**

**Even primitive stories have power to challenge and teach us
thousands of years after they first were told.**

**Every time we gather for the Eucharist on the Lord's Day
we speak a language we all understand,
a language inspired by the same Spirit
who came upon the disciples at Pentecost
and whose power we call down upon the gifts of bread and wine
on this altar.**

**We speak here the language of the Word of God,
the Word made flesh,
the Word whose, flesh - body and blood -
speaks eloquently the language of love
Christ uttered and offered us on the Cross.**

**May this Pentecost celebration find us eager to:
understand all peoples, wherever they may be;
to be gathered as one people in the love of our God;**

and to find in our diversity a unity

whose truth is justice and whose strength is peace.

Rev. Austin Fleming