

Sermon Notes



Sermon: Babel

Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was 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.

Monday: Read Genesis 13:14-18

Immediately following the story of Babel, we meet Abram. The people have been scattered; they didn't, couldn't, or wouldn't listen and so God speaks to Abram. Chapter 12 opens with the Hebrew words *Lekh Lekha*, are often translated as "go forth," or "go from" But more literally, they suggest something like, "Go for yourself," or even "Go to yourself." Rashi, a noted Rabbi of Jewish biblical exegesis, interprets them to mean that Abram's journey is for his own good, and his own benefit. Abram is told not merely that he must give up everything to find something different and more in tune with God's values, but that he must understand that Abram can only be what he is intended to be (a man fully conscious that he, and all others, are created in the image of God) when his own wants, needs, and aspirations correspond to God's. Abram listens, and the world is blessed. How is God calling you to go—for the good of the world, but more importantly for your own benefit? Do you listen? How do you respond?

Prayer: God, speak I am listening. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 28:10-17

The God of Jacob's father and his grandfather promises Jacob life and life abundant. God will accompany Jacob, protect Jacob and bring Jacob home. All along the way, God vows to be present in Jacob's life. The word God spoke to Jacob in the midst of his dream was a word of grace undeserved, love Jacob never expected to receive. There was nothing that even indicated Jacob had any kind of relationship with God, and yet, in the middle of the night, God speaks to Jacob the fugitive. The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes: "the miracle [of this story] is the way this sovereign God binds himself to this treacherous figure." But I wonder if the miracle of this story also lies in Jacob's willingness to hear and receive this word of grace. God chooses to be decisively present in the life of a double-crossing man on the run, and God chooses to be present in my life and your life, if we are willing to listen. When have you heard God speaking words of grace? How have you experienced reconciliation with God? with others? How might God be offering you words of grace now?

Prayer: God, help me to hear and receive your word of forgiveness. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Romans 8:12-17

We are all part of a family. Family is something we all have experienced in some way. Birth family, adoptive family, step family, foster family, institutional family. Family determines so much of who we are, whether we're talking genes or experience, family of origin or the people who become family. But we are also all part of God's family—children of God, says Paul. Loving, supportive, accepting, encouraging, helping. That sounds easier than it is. Because real life is made up of real people, we usually act like real people, meaning imperfect, flawed people. But we gather together anyway. Together. That's the operative word. If allowed only one word to describe the Church at its best, I would choose "together." Together, a community made whole in diversity and heterogeneity, stronger because we are different. Who is included in your family? When have you experienced

strength in diverse perspectives, experiences, or opinions? How has that experience drawn you into God's family?

Prayer: Lord, remind me to celebrate the diversity of humanity. Amen.

Thursday: Read John 14:15-17

Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit? Of course not. We don't know what the Spirit looks like. Except.... Except that in this passage John gives us a picture. John tells us the Holy Spirit looks like an Advocate --the one who stands up for you when you need it; the one who speaks on your behalf; the one who lends you a helping hand, takes your side, and won't leave you while you're down. The one who comes along beside and walks with; it's no wonder, then, that Jesus says, "you know him." Because, as it turns out, the Holy Spirit at one time or another has probably looked a lot like you, maybe even a lot like me, and definitely a lot like each and all of us when we do these things. When has someone been your advocate? When have you been able to come along beside someone else in a moment of need?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, fill me so that I might bear the image of Christ in the world today. Amen.

Friday: Read Ephesians 1:8b-13

The Greek word used in this text is *akouo* and it means to hear with attention, hear with the "ear of the mind". The idea is to hear so that we will do what is spoken. To listen and pay attention to a person with resulting action on our part. The context often implies to hear and obey (the old word "heed" conveys this sense). This is a collective listening and a unified response, one for the whole church. As we, as a community, "live the Gospel" before others, the message we "speak" with our life will provide an opportunity to be the church in the world. How do we listen as a community? In what ways do we live the Gospel? How might we as a church *akouo* more intentionally?

Prayer: Holy God, may we hear you and respond to be your church today and always. Amen.

Saturday: Read Psalm 104

In Psalm 104, the world that God creates and recreates is not just ordered, but rhythmic, each created thing a note that contributes to the Spirit's song, all necessary for a joyous harmony. There is joy at the foundation of the earth, in the dew on the grass, in the romping of a dog, in the quiet of cricket song on a summer night. There is joy in the wondrous interdependence of God's creatures, in the necessity in which we exist for one another. There is joy in the winning over of the chaos that continues to threaten God's harmonious creation. There is joy in the gifts of life and spirit that we receive from God, and in our rejoicing in those gifts. For this joy, we offer God our joyous praise. Where do you find joy today? For what do you offer praise and thanksgiving?

Prayer: Creating God, may your Spirit fill the earth as we offer songs of praise. Amen.