

## “A Gospel for All Nations”

--CEFC 7/29/18—w/ Ethiopian Church

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It has certainly been interesting worshipping in two languages this morning.  
I am only sorry that I can't speak Amharic  
so that I could speak more directly to our guests.  
I love the Amharic letters—  
they look like little people running across the page!

It is sad that we are divided by our different ways of speaking.  
It is such a barrier to communication and relationships.

Some of you may remember Esperanto?  
Esperanto was to be a universal language that everyone could speak.  
It created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
by a Polish-Jewish philologist  
as a means of drawing people from diverse cultures together.  
The name Esperanto comes from the pseudonym of its inventor--  
it means "hoping one"—  
and he's still hoping, I guess.  
There have been over 200 such languages devised during the years.  
Never has one caught on.

If only we had a universal language--  
a language that everyone could speak and understand--  
If only we could communicate better,  
then the world would be a far more peaceful place in which to live.

It seems so obvious--  
and for that reason, what we find in the Bible surprises us--  
maybe even shocks us--  
when we read in Gen. 11 that  
when “**the whole world had one language and a common speech,**”  
it is the Lord who says,  
“**Let us go down and confuse their language  
so they will not understand each other**” (v. 7).

“Why?” we ask.  
Why should our God be a God who confuses—  
a God who creates diverse languages,  
a God who hinders communication among human beings?

The answer implied in the Bible lies in the heart of fallen human beings--  
It is the human condition spoiled by sin  
that caused the Lord to act as he did.

In Genesis 11:1 we read that

**“the whole world had one language and a common speech. . . .  
They said to each other, “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.”**

And in this verse we get to the heart of the story--  
for here we get a glimpse into the human heart apart from God.  
We see here two basic human motivations—

First--we have the motivation of human pride--

**“Let us build for ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens  
so that we may make a name for ourselves,”** they say--  
It will be the greatest structure ever built--  
it will forever testify to our engineering skill.  
It will be a monument to human glory.”

This reflects that basic human desire for significance in this world.  
We want our lives to make a difference,  
to mean something,  
to have a lasting impact—in some way or fashion.  
We want to prove that our lives have value and dignity.  
We want to make a name for ourselves.

Heaven, of course, is the home of God--  
and in aspiring to reach up to heaven,  
this ancient skyscraper is nothing but a sacrilege.  
Like Adam and Eve reaching up to eat of the fruit  
of the knowledge of good and evil,  
this is yet another human effort to become like God--  
to grab for the glory that belongs to God alone.  
Human beings were created in God’s image—  
we were created to bring honor to God  
by reflecting something of God in his creation.  
God is the one who makes man’s name great--  
God is the one who makes his own name great.  
This building of a city with its magnificent tower  
arises from human pride—to make our name great--  
seeking significance, honor, and greatness,  
apart from the God who made us.

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But notice the second motivation at work here--  
one that seems to contradict the first.

**“Let us build this city with its great tower and make a name for ourselves,  
so that we not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”**

These people are motivated by pride in seeking significance,

but also, they are motivated by fear--  
fear in the face of their own weakness  
and vulnerability.

They are fundamentally insecure--  
they are afraid that they will be dispersed across the globe  
and be unprotected and isolated and alone.

In their pride they sought significance apart from God,  
yet in their fear they realized their own insecurity.

Pride and fear--  
This is a picture of sinful humanity, folks--  
this is a picture of you and me.

We are all full of pride--  
We want to be like God--  
we want to be our own boss,  
we want to have our own way.  
We want to be the king or queen of our own little kingdoms.

But isn't it funny how deep inside  
there is also this other side in every one of us.  
There is fear--we're afraid that we're not really so great after all.  
We're afraid of failing and of being seen as a failure.

We're afraid of rejection;  
we're afraid that other people won't like us.  
We're afraid of all the bad things that might happen to us--  
financial disaster, serious illness, broken relationships, even death.

We want honor,  
but deep inside we know there is something about us that is shameful.  
We would be humiliated if people really knew what lay deep in our hearts.

We're afraid, because we recognize deep inside that we are insecure;  
we are vulnerable in this hard, cold, cruel world in which we live.

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But let's turn back to our text and consider the Lord's response  
to the building of this city,  
this secular city--  
built as a monument to the greatness of human beings without God.

Gen. 11:5--"**But the Lord came down to see the city  
and the tower that the people were building.**"

You have to appreciate the irony here.  
This was a magnificent city with a great tower  
that reached up into heaven,

but the Lord--he could hardly see it!

Our great God had to "**come down**;"  
 he had to lower himself to see this miniscule monument.  
 All human glory is nothing in the sight of God!  
 It is like the grass of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow.  
 We dare not forget that. /

And then God acts.

He confuses their language so they will not understand each other,  
 and then he scatters them over all the earth.  
 The peoples are dispersed across the globe,  
 separated into their disparate locations and languages.

This is the divine response to the pretensions of human pride.  
 In God's sovereign will, the secular city must not succeed.

The rationale for this act is found in v. 6—

The Lord says,  
**"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."**

Isn't this the same response that occurs earlier in Genesis,  
 after Adam and Eve had eaten from  
 the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord banished them from the garden,  
 and the angel with a flaming sword guarded the way to the tree of life.  
**"The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.  
 He must not be allowed to reach out his hand  
 and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever." (3:22)**

It must not happen. //

And why not?

Why did God feel compelled to thwart this act of human pride  
 and disperse these people?  
 Was it that God was **jealous** of man's potential power?  
 Was God **afraid** of having a rival?  
 Was he **threatened** by a possible coup,  
 which might depose him as King of the universe?  
 Of course not!

No, the Lord God was simply protecting the moral fabric of his creation  
 and ultimately protecting human beings from themselves.

God is holy—totally righteous and pure—and only what is holy can live in his presence.  
 When Adam and Eve sinned, they were no longer fit to stand before God,  
 so the Lord cast them from the garden—  
 they lost their true home.

And what a tragedy it is for human beings to live forever without God—  
in this state of sin.

The Lord cut them off from their home, from the source of life,  
so that they would seek him in faith out of a heart of need.

Human beings must not try to find their significance nor their security apart from God,  
for they must come to see that it can't be found anywhere but in him.

God is gracious to us when he doesn't allow us to feel at home in this fallen world,  
living apart from a relationship with him.

He is merciful to us when he creates in us a sense of homesickness—  
a longing for that garden, that place where we live in his love  
and enjoy his protection.

God has graciously given us longings in our hearts  
that nothing in this world can fully satisfy.  
They cannot be satisfied apart from him.

God is merciful in his judgments.

God is gracious in declaring that the secular city must fail.

It must fail,  
because without God,  
we human beings are neither wise enough nor good enough  
to bear the responsibility of the power we could amass.

You see, human solidarity in itself is not good--  
not if it is a solidarity in human pride,  
a solidarity in human sin;  
a solidarity with no checks on the corrupting effects of power.

When you think about it, one world order, with one language, one voice--  
united under one leader--all apart from a godly reference point--  
that is a prescription for a horrible tyranny and the most unthinkable terror.  
The Lord in his mercy would not let it happen.

And so they were scattered,  
and the very thing these people wanted to prevent takes place  
because of the very means they used in trying to prevent it.

It's a tragic picture—  
human beings scattered,  
divided into myriad nations  
with myriad languages—  
confused and conflicted.

Isn't that the world we live in today?

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So I ask, Is this the way things will always be?  
Is there any hope?

There is—

for in the very next chapter in the Bible  
God reveals himself to a man named Abram

and makes him a gracious promise:

Gen. 12:1—"The LORD had said to Abram,

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household  
and go to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

This is a new starting point

in the Lord's dealing with humanity.

And notice how the blessings to Abraham seem to counterbalance the curses  
that have so far come upon the earth in the Biblical story--

In Gen. 3 the ground was cursed because of Adam's sin,

but Abraham is promised a new land.

Cain was cursed and became a wanderer (4:11, 14)

Abraham the wanderer is given a home.

The people of chap. 11 tried to make a name for themselves;

God says to Abraham, "**I will . . . make your name great.**" (v.2)

And at Babel the peoples of the earth were scattered;

but in Abraham all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.<sup>1</sup>

The rest of the Bible unfolds the story of God

working out this plan of blessing to the nations—

his plan to create a new people

united with one another in their relationship with him.

One nation, Israel, was to reveal the Lord in this holiness and grace to the world,

but they fail to live up to this divine calling.

Instead, that vocation falls upon God's Servant, his own Son,

whom God sends into the world to bring redemption to the world.

Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man,

dies a sacrificial death on a cross,

to take away our sin,

and then he is raised from the dead on the third day to give us new life.

Jesus is now Savior and Lord of all—

and everyone everywhere is called to repent and put their trust in him.

This saving work of God is to be proclaimed to the whole world,

drawing men and women from every nation

into one new people.

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Atkinson.

We begin to get a glimpse of this new work of God on the Day of Pentecost,  
 recounted in the Book of Acts,  
 when the Holy Spirit came upon those first followers of Jesus,  
 and they began to speak of the wonders of God.

It was a feast day in Jerusalem,  
 and **“God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven”** were gathered there,  
 we’re told (Acts 2:5).

And they were baffled and bewildered,

**“because each one heard [these Christians] speaking in his own language.**

**Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?**

**Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?**

**Parthians, Medes and Elamites;**

**residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,**

**Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,**

**Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene;**

**visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism);**

**Cretans and Arabs—**

**we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (2:6-11).**

God was doing a new thing—

the curse of Babel was being reversed.

God was creating a new people from among all nations.

John, in his vision in the Book of Revelation

gives us a picture of what this people will be like—

Rev. 7:9—**“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude**

**that no one could count,**

**from every nation, tribe, people and language,**

**standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.**

**They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.**

**And they cried out in a loud voice:**

**“Salvation belongs to our God,**

**who sits on the throne,**

**and to the Lamb.”**

Notice, in this heavenly vision, the people of this great multitude are still identified

as those of different nations, tribes, and peoples;

they still speak different languages.

But somehow, the cultural barriers that separate them are overcome,

and, while preserving their diverse identities,

they are united in a common voice of praise to God and to the Lamb

in a language they could all understand.

What a glorious reality!

This is how human beings were meant to live

in unity and love, in praise before our great and gracious God./

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And that transcendent unity of this redeemed people of God  
is to be previewed even now in the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul says to the Christians of the church of Galatia—

All you who believe in Christ  
are recipients of God's promise of blessing to the nations  
that once came to Abraham.

More than that, **"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus,  
for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed,  
and heirs according to the promise"** (Gal. 3:26-29).

Elsewhere Paul says,

In Christ **"there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised,  
barbarian, Scythian, slave or free,  
but Christ is all, and is in all"** (Col. 3:11).

Yes, we may speak different languages,

and we come from very different cultural heritages,  
but as believers in Jesus Christ,

we are now members of a new people, a new family—  
the household of God;

and as believers in Jesus Christ,

we are fellow citizens of a new commonwealth, a new nation—  
the Kingdom of God.

So here today, we celebrate that unity in Christ—

We gather together—from various nations, speaking different languages—

as a picture, a foretaste, a glimpse, of what is yet to come—

when we will one day be joined together as one new people,

enjoying that heavenly wedding feast,

as a part of that great heavenly multitude

**"from every nation, tribe, people and language,**

**standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb,**

**crying out in a loud voice:**

**"Salvation belongs to our God,**

**who sits on the throne,**

**and to the Lamb."**

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*Go down to the communion table—*

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And, you see, this communion meal that we are sharing together  
is to be a pointer to that great future.  
When Jesus shared this meal with his disciples  
on the night before his death,  
he said he would not drink with them again from the fruit of the vine  
until he would drink it anew with them in his Father's kingdom.

And Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, said,  
**"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks  
a participation in the blood of Christ?  
And is not the bread that we break  
a participation in the body of Christ?  
Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body,  
for we all partake of the one loaf"** (1 Cor. 10:16,17).

God's great plan of redemption revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ  
is being played out before our very eyes this morning—  
is this gathering of worship.

Let's stop to reflect on this great gospel  
as we prepare our hearts to come to this table—  
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Prayer—

Invite the servers to come forward—  
from Cornerstone and Mekane Yesu.  
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Words of institution—  
**"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed . . ."**

If you are believer in Christ—  
if you've trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord,  
and if you've professed that faith before God's people—  
and if you regularly receive communion  
in your gospel-preaching church,  
you are welcome to come to join with us this table this morning.

Eat and Drink—and rejoice in the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.

May our participation in this meal together  
be a celebration of our unity in Christ—  
we are members of the one body,  
this new people of God.  
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As the ushers dismiss people by row,  
if you want to join in this meal,  
come forward to one of the stations—  
eat of the bread, drink of the cup  
and return to your seat.

We will sing as people are served.

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Benediction: Pray for Lunch--

**May the God who gives endurance and encouragement  
give you a spirit of unity among yourselves  
as you follow Christ Jesus,  
so that with one heart and mouth  
you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

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**Sermon Discussion--**

- Read Gen. 11:1-9. How do people seek to “make a name for themselves” today? What do you hope will give your life significance and value? How does the gospel provide a sure source of significance?
- Where do people hope to find security today? How does the gospel provide a sure source of security?
- What are the sources of discord and division in the world today? How can the gospel create a new source of unity amidst diversity?
- Read Eph. 4:1-6. Pray for this unity in our church and among Christians.