

**- Saint John's Pulpit (May 23, Day of Pentecost)
- "You Already Got a New Language!" Acts 2:1-13**

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. **7** Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." **12** All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

From Chaos to Cosmos

Whenever we celebrate a season of Pentecost, the text today is one of the popular stories in the Bible. I believe that Acts 2 is the most important resource to know how the Holy Spirit worked among the first Christians. It is full of all kinds of spiritual and mysterious scenes.

More interestingly, we need to know that the first sign of experiencing the Holy Spirit was a change in languages. So, if we identify ourselves as people of God, don't you think that our first action item is to transform our language?

Here is another reason why we read this story in terms of language transformation. In the Bible, there is one more story to deal with human language in Genesis. Your guessing says a story of the Tower of Babel. Let me read Genesis 11:1-9.

***11** Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. **2** And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** 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.*

***4** 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."*

***5** The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. **6** 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.*

***7** Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." **8** So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. **9** 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. Genesis 11:1-9 NRSV*

As we know, the story of the Tower of Babel presents an origin of dysfunctional languages in the human world. You never know how much I didn't like this story when I began to learn English. This story gave people a motif to learn foreign languages! Because they built the tower, my stress level was being built up because of English!

Since then, people had used different languages in the world, and now in Acts 2, people are experiencing perfect communication with one another. How? Through the Holy Spirit!

A careful reading of both stories (Genesis 11 and Acts 2) makes us see some similarities. For example, in Genesis 11 people gathered together like the first Christians did the same on a day of Pentecost. People began to a tower from down to top in Genesis 11, but God began to pour out the Holy Spirit from top to down.

Besides these characters, one clear difference can be shown from these stories. It is about what they speak. In Genesis 11, while people were building the tower, their language was presenting one goal. What was it?

⁴ 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, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:4 ESV

Let us make a name for ourselves... in other words, they wanted to brag about their greatness! They wanted to show how they are great, knowledgeable, and powerful. After all, their language contents drove them to be dispersed and be in communication troubles.

What about the first Christians on a Day of Pentecost in Acts 2? Although they were from different settings in culture and language, they spoke the same topic together. What was their topic? In Acts 2:11,

¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." Acts 2:11 ESV

On the Day of Pentecost, when they experienced the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in their own languages, but spoke the same thing- the mighty works of God! Plus, no communication issues!

When all different people began to speak about God's deeds of power, they could communicate with one another. So, the chaos in languages from the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) eventually had been resolved on the Day of Pentecost! If so, what lessons does the story present these days?

If Acts 2 was a reverse version for the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), the first Christians in Acts 2 should have spoken one language

regardless of their birthplaces! But, people still used different languages from each of their home places. The language of the Holy Spirit was not linguistic issues, but in the content itself, what they speak – God’s mighty works!

By contrast, although people used one language, when they began to speak about human thoughts and ideas, they lost the power of communication. Then they were scattered out!

How to Become One Body

What about churches and Christians? Churches today need to speak about God’s deeds of power. This faithful testimony leads us into holy and holistic communication with one another. Although we are different, we feel one body in Christ. However, when churches begin to speak about their deeds and thoughts, they would experience another version of the tower of Babel.

This Tuesday night, when I joined a council meeting, I could feel that we were surrounded by the Holy Spirit. All council leaders spoke about God’s deeds of power! From the preschool Re-opening to doing successful in-person services, although we serve our church in different positions, what we all spoke was the same- how God worked for us here at St. John’s! We now experience the Holy Spirit by welcoming three new members today!

Chaotic Pandemic, but we are in the Holy Spirit

Still, we are in the pandemic. Although we received a new guideline from the CDC, Governor and Bishop, what we see is still chaotic. Like the story of the Tower of the Babel, it has been for a while since all people have been dispersed physically or emotionally, even spiritually. People used to ask me this question. “Pastor, I don’t know where we are going.” I fully agree with it because I ask the same question to myself lots of times!

However, before asking that question, we should ask this question first. “What are we doing now?” The answer is very simple and clear. We are speaking about God’s mighty works here at St. John’s! Let’s encourage one another and share God’s deeds of power with people. Come, Holy Spirit!