

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

PENTECOST SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We gather together because God has called us.
All: We wait in expectant awe for God's appearing.
One: We tremble before the power of the Holy Spirit.
All: What will happen if we let the Spirit in?
One: On this Pentecost, we can receive the surprises of God.
All: With hesitant eagerness, we welcome the Spirit.
We will risk stepping into God's vision for us.

***OPENING HYMN** "Come, O Spirit, Dwell Among Us" GtG 280

1. **Come, O Spirit, dwell among us;
come with Pentecostal power;
give the church a stronger vision;
help us face each crucial hour.
Built upon a firm foundation,
Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone,
still the church is called to mission
that God's love shall be made known.**
2. **We would raise our alleluias
for the grace of yester-years;
for tomorrow's unknown pathway,
hear, O Lord, our humble prayers.
In the church's pilgrim journey
you have led us all the way;
still in presence move before us,
fire by night and cloud by day.**
3. **Come, O Spirit, dwell among us;
give us words of fire and flame.
Help our feeble lips to praise you,
glorify your holy name.**

**Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Three in One: what mystery!
We would sing our loud hosannas
now and through eternity.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Without your power, O God, we are lost.
We have done the things we would avoid,
and what you desire, we have not done.
We build walls and barriers.
We assume and stereotype.
We devalue difference and stick with what is known and familiar.
Forgive our lack of courage.
Embolden us to cross boundaries of difference
and build bridges of understanding.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit
that our dreams and visions may be one with yours,
as you gather us together and call us to your community.
Through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: In the Spirit of the Lord we confide.
All: **In the mercy of God we trust.**
One: By the power of God we are restored.
All: **By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are renewed.**
One: So rejoice and celebrate this day!
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new
life. Alleluia! Amen!**

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod
of the head, etc.)*

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Genesis 11:1-9
Acts 2:1-12

GENESIS 11:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version+)

¹ 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 fire them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build for 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 mix up 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 mixed up the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

ACTS 2:1-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ 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?"

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Between Babel and Pentecost" by Pastor Bill Vincent

What if Pentecost is not the answer to the problem of Babel.

What if Pentecost is, instead, an embodiment of a path chosen at Babel: a path chosen, mind you, not by the people, but by God – which somehow seems appropriate, don't you think?

We build cities of sameness and want to call them the City of God. We speak the same language, you and I. We see things the same. It is familiar, it is comfortable, it is easy. And God walks in our midst, examining the work we have done. And God is not pleased. So God ends up scattering us across the face of the earth that we might learn: learn an important lesson about God, about creation, about ourselves, about life.

For all too often we overlook, we miss – we misunderstand – the wondrous variety of life – of people, of perspectives – as part of God’s plan for creation, God’s intent for human life, God’s will.

And when we misunderstand, we live in a bubble – we actually create a bubble.

Jill Duffield writes,

We have built cities for ourselves. Towers. ... Bubbles. Places where we all have one language and the same words and most of the time we think there are no others. ... [We are] fairly oblivious that other languages and words exist, metaphorically speaking. [We are] so myopic and caught up in [our] own world, [we] assume everyone else’s [is] just like [ours]. (“Looking into the Lectionary” May 15, 2016, Presbyterian Outlook)

And I am as guilty as the next person.

We are too content to speak only our own language, and not motivated to learn the language – metaphorically speaking – of another.

For to do that would mean we would have to shut our mouths and open our ears.

(You know what they say: God obviously intended us to listen more than to speak, seeing as how God made us with one mouth and two ears.)

To shut our mouths and open our ears seems contrary to the spirit of Pentecost. Peter is ready to give this great speech, and he and the others are speaking in different languages.

But notice also that others hear them in their own language.

The miracle of Pentecost may be far less those speaking in whatever language it was and far more that others heard and understood: they heard and understood the good news of “*God’s deeds of power,*” and understood it in their own language.

The real miracle of Pentecost is understanding.

And when we put it like that, we can see how indeed it is a miracle.

For how seldom does true understanding take place.

We are divided by the aisle of political persuasion.

We are divided by our belief about what happens here at this (communion) table.

We are divided by our national aspirations.

We are divided by our shape of the church.

And we are divided, not because we speak different languages, but because we do not understand, we will not understand – we do not want to understand.

For to hear the story of someone who is different from us is hard. It pushes us. It seeks to expand our mind and our heart. It seeks to open our eyes to new horizons and new possibilities and new perspectives.

And that's hard for us to do. We resist doing that.

So we build our city of sameness with one language and one way of doing things and one take on life.

When all along, God has tasked us with going out into the world – going out into life – to “*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth*” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

But we resist God's vision and seek to build our own. This, if you will, is the real ‘crime’ of Babel.

And when we insist on filling the earth with sameness, God mixes things up with variety, hoping that we will catch the vision, dream the dream – and dream it with God.

But we want to sneak back to the Plain of Shinar and build our whitewashed city of one language and one way of speaking and one way of doing and one way of life.

Until finally, God breathes God's Spirit of wonder and curiosity, of compassion and understanding into our hearts and into our lives. And maybe we will begin to speak in order to understand. But even before then, even more importantly, maybe we will begin to listen in order to understand. And begin to explore and see and revel in the wonder and variety and diversity and (as someone* puts it) “pizzazz” of God's creation and God's people – all God's people. (*Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, p.137; found in *Feasting on the Word C-3*, p.7)

“*What does this mean?*” the people gathered in Jerusalem asked.

It means the flowering, the bearing fruit of the path chosen by God at Babel: that people, and the world, are not all the same; they still hail from places with strange names like Pamphylia and Cyrene, Afghanistan and Ukraine; and that is part of the beauty and the multiplicity, part of the wonder and “pizzazz” and fruitfulness of “filling the earth.” But even in their diversity and difference, they can learn to understand one another, even though they still may speak in their own native language.

We are caught – we live – between Babel and Pentecost: a place where difference is not so much a barrier to overcome as it is a pathway to understand and a bridge to build.

Now, don't get me wrong. The emphasis on understanding differences does not suggest that “anything goes”; does not leave us swimming in an ocean of nothing but relativism where anything goes and nothing is wrong – or right, for that matter.

No.

There are paths and choices that are not the road of God's choice: not in tune with God's way of love and mercy, peace and justice.

And in many ways, we are called to walk a very narrow path of service and self-giving and other-serving – the way of the cross, we call it.

But have we made that path far too narrow? – or twisted it – by insisting that it always look like our path and our experience; by insisting that the landscape look European and white, and that justice benefit us and those like us; by insisting that the concepts that shape our lives be consistent with our way of thinking; and by failing to realize that others may indeed have experiences and perspectives on God and life that we have not seen and we have not known, but are just as legitimate and just as God-given as our own.

Does this mean I have to become like you in order to understand you?

No.

Does this mean I have to adapt your way of doing in order to appreciate your perspective on life?

No.

I can understand you without becoming you.

I can appreciate your perspective on life without swallowing your perspective on life hook, line, and sinker.

And I can affirm the value and beauty and wonder of another, without becoming the other.

I mean, really:

Do we really believe we all have to look like each other to love each other?

Do we really believe we all have to live the same in order to value the different?

There is a balance here, yes.

But it seems that all too often, we've gotten the balance out of balance. We've tipped the scales in our favor to the detriment – and de-valuing – of others; and it takes far too long for us to realize that their detriment is our detriment: that when I de-value another and their journey, I de-value my own.

You know, Jesus reached across barriers to understand, all the time. In his day and age, to reach out to men *and women* was radical. He did so with insiders and outsiders. From Jerusalem to Capernaum, to Sidon and Tyre.

And following his resurrection, after he had spent some days with the disciples, before he ascended into heaven, he told the disciples,

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Funny: sounds a lot like what God said at the beginning, *“be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”*

“You will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” “And you” – the disciples, us – “will be empowered to do that.”

Empowered, not to create one and only one language. But empowered to understand, *“each in their own native language.”*

We need a fresh wind to blow.

We need a fire in the belly.

We need to listen in order to understand; to understand before we speak.
We need to learn another's language; to listen to another perspective; to appreciate another voice beyond simply our own.
And to see God in the whole mix.

And if there is to be one language, it will be the language of love: of care for another and compassion toward another; of mercy and kindness, and desire for the welfare and well-being of another...just like God does.

And yes, this love, this understanding takes work and effort, commitment and intent.
AND, it will bear the fruit of seeing life through new eyes, and exploring depths of life you never knew existed. And it will bear the fruit of seeing God in new and different ways and new and different people – and seeing God in those people and those places where you never believed you'd see God. And so you will come to know God better and deeper and fuller...and others as well...and yourself, too.

This is the path from Babel to Pentecost, and beyond.

***HYMN** “In Christ Called to Baptize” GtG 297

**1. In Christ called to baptize, we witness to grace
and gather a people from each land and race.
In deep, flowing waters, we share in Christ's death,
then, rising to new life, give thanks with each breath.**

**2. In Christ called to banquet, one table we share,
a haven of welcome, a circle of care.
Although we are many, we share in one bread.
One cup of thanksgiving proclaims Christ, our head.**

**3. In Christ called to witness, by grace we will preach
the life-giving gospel; God's love we will teach.
By grace may our living give proof to our praise
in costly compassion reflecting Christ's ways.**

**4. Unite us, anoint us, O Spirit of love,
for you are within us, around us, above.
Equip us for service with gifts you bestow.
In Christ is our calling. In Christ may we grow.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Wondrous God...
People: ...wash over us with your Spirit.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

God of wind and fire, may new life be breathed into the world because of the gifts we return to you. Grant us enhanced capacity to carry your revelation to others in ways they can understand. We seek to be to one another channels of your love and peace, both in person and through the outreach of our offerings. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold the bread so that we may partake of it together, reflecting our unity in Christ.)

Sing "Come to the Table of Grace" GtG 507

- 1. Come to the table of grace.
Come to the table of grace.
This is God's table;
it's not yours or mine.
Come to the table of grace.**
- 2. Come to the table of peace...**
- 3. Come to the table of love...**

(Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of the unique selves we bring to our Lord.)

Sing “Come to the Table of Grace” GtG 507

1. **Come to the table of grace.**
Come to the table of grace.
This is God’s table;
it’s not yours or mine.
Come to the table of grace.
4. **Come to the table of hope...**
5. **Come to the table of joy...**

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “O God in Whom All Life Begins” GtG 308

1. **O God in whom all life begins,
who births the seed to fruit,
bestow your blessing on our lives;
here let your love find root.
Bring forth in us the Spirit’s gifts
of patience, joy, and peace;
deliver us from numbing fear,
and grant our faith increase.**

2. **Unite in mutual ministry
our minds and hands and hearts
that we may have the grace to seek
the power your peace imparts.
So let our varied gifts combine
to glorify your Name
that in all things by word and deed
we may your love proclaim.**

3. **Through tears and laughter, grief and joy,
enlarge our trust and care;
so bind us in community
that we may risk and dare.**

**Be with us when we gather here
to worship, sing, and pray;
then send us forth in power and faith
to live the words we say.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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