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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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**Us-Centered Language Lead to Babbling Confusion
Christ-Centered Language Leads to Spirit-Filled Unity**

Genesis 11:1-9

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The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. Amen.

In his book, *Postmodern Times*, author Gene Veith compares the confusion and disillusion in our society today to the judgment experienced at the Tower of Babel. In America today, we see Postmodernism showing itself. All around us we see a rather diverse, fragmented society. Our culture is constantly buzzing about issues of racism, bigotry, partisanship, hatred, sexism, gender inequality. And yet it seems the more we try to fix things, the more defined the divisions become. Clashes of classes, ethnicities, sexes, religious beliefs continue to show we are not of one mind or one cause for the good of America. All around us are fundamentally different ways of looking at the world and talking about God. We've grown quite used it in fact—a fragmented world; different ideas about what success is; arguments about what political solutions will work; disagreement about who God is and what is good and right. Each has his own thoughts, his own story, and his own rights. There is no common language.

What we see happening is symptomatic of something called "Postmodernism" and postmodernism is the reaction against an earlier time and way of thinking called "Modernism." The Modern Era was a period of time emerging from the 18th century where people had a different view of the world. It used to be assumed that truth was knowable and universal—not any more. The world was not seen as fragmented, but as a united whole. Philosophers and scientists believed that through the use of reason and science, the world can be united in one common cause and purpose. It was a time of progress, discovery, optimism. In many ways, the Modern era parallels the aims and goals that unified the world at the Tower of Babel. As Veith puts it, "the technology of Modernism, more advanced than the Babelites', enabled them to build not just a tower to reach the heavens, but spaceships to reach the moon."

Yet, what do we see today? Do we see that world united? Do we see that greater goal being accomplished for our futures? After all the efforts of philosophers and scientist to unite the world, it crumbled. And this is nothing new. There is nothing new

under the sun. In fact, what we have witnessed taking place over the last several centuries is only an echo of what God made happen 5500 years ago.

Genesis 11:1–9

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. ² And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. ³ Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. ⁴ And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. ⁶ And the Lord said, “Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. ⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name is 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.

This Word of the Lord is spoken for you.

We pray, Oh Lord, pour out your Spirit on us; speak to us and dwell with us, that we might be one fellowship, even as you Oh Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One God. Amen.

The us-centered goal of Babel fails

It all seemed like a good idea. Everything was in place to make this project come to life. It was the sort of scenario corporate CEO’s lay awake at night dreaming of. Here’s a group of people, committed to one great goal: “to make a name for themselves.” They are unified in one common goal. Not only that but they also are great communicators. They all speak the same language; ethnically they are one and culturally they are all saying the same thing. Not only that but they also have the technology to make it happen. They have come up with the right materials for bricks, they have built an oven to bake them in, and they’ve come up with a sort of tar for mortar. And they assert the mission: “Come, let us...” “Come, let us make bricks...” “Come, let us build ourselves a tower...” “Come, let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad.” They’ve got the mission, the communication, and the technology in place. What could stop them?

There is something that would stop them, however. And it is found in that repetitious “come, let us...” “come, let us...” There is something in that phrase that ultimately would come to destroy their plans. And that is, it was all “us-centered” language.

Our us-centered goals fail

Us-centered goals may seem good at the time, but eventually they are bound to fail. Now, we may accomplish all that we set out to do, but eventually, whatever it is that we’ve accomplished for ourselves will be destroyed. What God wants to remind us of today is that this world and the things in it are just not going to last.

If we say, “Come, let us make this church grow...” what will happen? Will we sacrifice doctrine for outward unity? Will we revise the liturgy to avoid mentioning sin? Will we adapt our preaching to offer you self-help advice? Will we do whatever we can to appeal to the world?

Or, if we say, “Come, let us make this marriage better...” what will happen? Will we look at marriage as a choice between a better marriage or no marriage at all? Will we define expectations for what our spouse is supposed to be doing while ignoring ourselves? Will we image marriage is about getting rather than giving?

Or if we say, “Come, let us make ourselves better...” what will happen? Will we set up goals for a better diet, a better job, more time in prayer, less sinning? Will we judge ourselves by how everyone else is getting worse? Will we despair because we have not become what we have told ourselves we should be?

If we should say, “Come, let us make a name for ourselves...” what will happen to the name of God?

The irony of this story is that the people of Babel did make a name for themselves. God said, “Come, let us go down...” It was God’s time for action now. God’s time to declare his name and to give the people of Babel what they wanted: a name. “Therefore its name is called ‘Babel’” ... or still yet it should be pronounced *Babble*—for there the Lord. God’s work is to scatter the us-centered goals of the world. And so He caused the language of Babel to be confused. He scattered from that one people into all the various languages and nations that make up this fractured world we live in. He made the people *Babel* into the a bunch of *Babbling* fools.

The scattered remains of Babel are gathered by the Spirit at Pentecost

The reason for God scattering the us-centered language of the Babel was so that they would give up on their wasted goals. All that effort, all that time and work, what was it for? Where did that cause go? Where is that tower today? And where will that name be in eternity? In eternity there is only one name that will remain; and that name is what gathers together all peoples, all nations, all tribes, and all languages into one common, united cause.

The young man has just arrived in Jerusalem. He has journeyed with his family all the way from Egypt. It has taken them over two weeks to make the long trek through the desert and finally to reach Jerusalem by the day of the Festival. They've brought their offerings from the early grain as directed in the Law and have prepared to celebrate the feast of first fruits with their fellow Jews from all over the world.

But most of those Jews they see in Jerusalem don't speak their language. There are many languages, many ethnicities even, who have come. Yet they are all there for the same thing: to hear the Word of the Lord, to receive the His blessing, and to give their grain offering.

As the young man was making his way through the streets toward the Temple, suddenly a fierce sound came from heaven; a rushing, mighty wind swept down. He heard it, as if it came right by him, but could not see or feel it. So he ran after it and came to the place where there were the disciples of Jesus Christ were gathered. And there he saw all the other pilgrims, from every nation, gathered to see what this was.

And as he stood by, suddenly a man next to him said, "Have you heard? Jesus of Nazareth was dead and is now alive. God has sent him to be the Messiah! He was crucified by the leaders in Jerusalem, but God has shown us that this was according to His will and plan since time began. It is the fulfillment of all the Scriptures. Jesus suffered and died for our sins, and he was raised to bring us righteousness. He ascended to the right hand of God and has sent us to tell you about this." Now the young man knew who this was; he was a disciple of Jesus from Galilee. And yet, there he was speaking to him in coptic—his own native tongue. How could this be?

Then the crowd grew silent. The young man tuned to see Peter standing up on a platform before the whole assembly. Peter began to preach and he showed how all that is taking place was marking that the end of the age had come upon us. It was a fulfillment of what had been said by the prophet Joel—that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And there he was, among so many, yet God was offering him

and all those gathered the use of his sacred name. There he was among all those nations of the world, among so many ages, ethnicities, men and women, boys and girls, and God pouring out His Spirit upon all of them!

This was God's work of reuniting what had been frustrated at Babel. Here he was changing the *Babeling* words of the world into the Spirit-filled words of the Gospel. That is what Christ-centered language does. It leads to Spirit-filled unity in the Gospel.

The scattered remains of Postmodernism are gathered by the Spirit today

Only this can bring us a cause worth living for. Only this will bring us a name that will last. He brings His name to us today, and gathers the scattered remains that we see all around us.

I mentioned earlier how the Tower of Babel parallels what has happened in our society in the last few hundred years. We have become confused. The idea that reason and philosophy could unite the world has been frustrated. And what we are left with is a fractured world. All these arguments about rights and equality, race and class—no matter how well-intentioned, all find their beginnings in Babel. The question is, on what basis will we put back together what has been broken. This is true in so many aspects of our lives.

In our churches—how will we gather what has been scattered; is there a way to talk about our faith with those who do not share the same beliefs? What is the basis for fellowship? How shall we remain united in the Spirit? As the crowds grows silent, Peter stands up and says, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

In our marriages—how can we resolve those differences, those harsh words, those selfish actions and neglect of our spouse? As the crowds grows silent, Peter stands up and says, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

In ourselves—how can we deal with the conflict within; we wish we were better people, better Christians; that we were healthier, that we prayed more, that we did more good rather than evil; how can we find peace for our scattered, troubled thoughts? As the crowds grows silent, Peter stands up and says to all who are listening, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

God has made a name for Himself and that name is here; the only name under heaven by which we are saved; the only name which brings us His Spirit and draws us together; the name which crosses all boundaries, and overcomes all bitterness, discord,

hatred, conflict of conscience; and that name is Jesus. In Jesus, God has “come down,” to us, to silence our babbling confusion, and in silence to speak a word that will save us. God has said “let us come down,” only in this event, God is not bringing his judgment on us, but on His Son. God has come down and on the cross has saved us and brought us His Spirit. This is Christ centered language. Let us now grow silent to listen, as Peter stands up and says, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Here is where our babbling stops. There is no lasting unity that is not centered in Christ. No cause for greater church growth; no advice for better marriages; no five steps for a better you can accomplish what the Holy Spirit is doing here in this word of repentance and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Because here, Babel crumbles, and the Holy Christian Church is lifted up. Pentecost brings together the scattered language of this world.

As we seek to overcome these challenges to our culture, there will be no other way, than the work of God’s Spirit among those who call on His name in truth. That is the basis for fellowship after all. That is the basis for strong marriages. That is the basis for our own assurance of peace with God: to listen to the language of the gospel; to abandoned the us-centered talk; and call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid.” Amen.