

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; John 16:4b-15

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Picture it, if you will...

You're on a vast, grassy plain. Everyone is there with you. You all decide that it's a great place to build a city, so you start making bricks and mortar. Somewhere along the way, someone suggests a tower, and that the city should be the crowning achievement of mankind. "We're going to make a name for ourselves," they say.

So, the city and tower are being built, monuments to the greatness of mankind. The plans are in place, and they are grandiose. Foundations are established, brick and mortar laid, buildings are formed, and a great tower right in the middle. All the while, you're feeling pretty good about yourself; you take pride in the structures you've had a hand in building.

Now, God decided to take a closer look at all that had been done, and He comes to the conclusion that now is the time to disperse the people. Furthermore, he had to confuse their languages so that they would have trouble communicating with each other. This would help to prevent them from doing something so haughty again.

So, right in the middle of their tasks, maybe as they were building more buildings, maybe putting the finishing touches on what they had already built, maybe they were hunting or fishing or gathering or farming. Maybe there were some who were right in the middle of addressing some others, giving a speech or a sermon of some sort. They would have been addressing their friends and neighbors, talking to you, then right in the middle of the address, they would *begynne å forkynne for deg på et annet språk som du ikke kunne forstå. Hvem vet, predikanten kan til og med bli overrasket over den selv, eller kanskje han ville lure på hvorfor dere alle begynte å se på ham som forvirrede valpehunder. Du kan til og med tro at han er full.*

[...start preaching to you in a different language that you couldn't understand. Who knows, the preacher might even be surprised by it himself, or maybe he would wonder why you all started looking at him like confused puppy dogs. You might even think that he's drunk.]

clear throat

Anyway, you get the idea. That might be the way things went on the plains of Shinar that fateful day. The people did make a name for themselves: from that day, the place was known as Babel, because God had confused people's language there. It's not the least bit ironic that many languages today use some form or derivative of the word babble to indicate confused or confusing speech.

Picture it, if you will...

You're in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. You're there to celebrate a harvest but also the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Here's the thing, though: your family hasn't lived in the Promised Land for a very long time. Sure, you've all made your way there for the appointed times, but you're even less a resident of the Holy Land than the Roman officials and soldiers occupying the place. Consequently, your native language is not Aramaic or Hebrew or even Greek; sure, you know enough to get by in certain situations, such as buying some bread to eat, and you may be able to recite one thing or another in the synagogue in Jerusalem, but the sermon makes no sense to you.

Suddenly, there's some commotion down the street. You heard a rushing wind for a moment, even felt it, and made your way in the direction that it blew. As you get there, you see 12 men who look aglow, tongues of fire resting on them, and they're speaking. What's more, you can understand them... every word! You turn to the guy next to you and begin to talk to him, but then realize that he's from somewhere else; he can't understand you, but he can understand these men.

You hear an amazing sermon on the Messiah, that He has come and died and rose again, and

that He is ascended into Heaven, because He is the Son of God who is the propitiation for all sins, even yours. Salvation is finally come (not that those who came before were necessarily lost)! And by their preaching, they are delivering this salvation directly to you and into you. It's a good thing you can understand what is being said.

Later that day, you are baptized, one of about 3000 added to their number that day. (cf. Acts 2:41)

Pentecost is the antidote of Babel. Where once God confused languages in order that sinful man wouldn't become too full of himself, on Pentecost He undid that confusion—miraculously—so that man could be full of God, at least many of those assembled in Jerusalem that day. For on that day, and in the days since, many have been added to the number of the Church because Christ had been preached into them, including you, dear hearers! Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins has been proclaimed to you, and you have heard it and understood it because the marvelous deeds of God have been proclaimed to you in English (and maybe a little Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, and Norwegian now-and-then, if only to make a point).

But that's the way God works, isn't it? He pronounces a curse, but also gives a way out from under it. At Babel, He cursed mankind with confused languages, yet in the centuries since, he has undone that by giving people His Word in languages that they understand. In the garden, He cursed mankind with death—by his own choosing, it should be said—yet proclaimed that there would be a chosen Seed by which He would rescue man from death and give eternal life.

Much of the focus of this day is usually the tongues of fire and the speaking in other languages as the Spirit gave the apostles utterance. While that is a great thing to look at, the story of Pentecost is more than that—so much more! First, Peter uses the prophet Joel to explain that all of these people in Jerusalem being able to understand these 12 had been prophesied. That's as far as today's second reading goes, ending before Peter gets to the real meat of the day, proclaiming the reversal of mankind's bondage to death:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,
"I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,
"The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool."

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:22-36)

This word cut the people to the heart, they were convicted, and asked what they needed to do in order to be saved. Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized," and about 3000 of them did so that day. Peter and the other 11 did exactly as Jesus told them they would. He said, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." And the Holy Spirit did that day exactly what Jesus said He would do: "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

The people that first Pentecost were convicted of sin; they were cut to the heart and repentant. They were convicted of righteousness, having received the word of forgiveness and Holy Baptism. They were convicted of judgment, having heard that the devil is judged guilty and they are judged not guilty for the sake of Christ. And this is the same thing the Holy Spirit does day-in-and-day-out to all who hear and receive him—even you, right here and right now.

For you see, you are the reason that Jesus had come and went to the cross. Oh, it's certainly nice to think of that in terms of having now been saved, but don't neglect the Law in all of this. If it weren't for your father Adam having disobeyed the word of God not to eat of the forbidden tree, and if it weren't for you adding to that by your own daily participation in his disobedience—forsaking God and His ways—then Jesus would not have needed to come and be crucified. Because of you, God had to die. This is the work of the Holy Spirit with the Law, to show you your sin and convict you of it, to show you that on your own merits, you are unworthy of the paradise that God had originally intended for you to live in, and even moreso the paradise of eternal life that He has now prepared for you.

But, because God chose to die in your place, He now freely gives to you the merits which do make you worthy of the paradise of eternal life—the same paradise that Jesus told the repentant thief he would see that day from the cross. That's because He has given you the same repentance and faith to receive Him and believe in Him—a faith which calls upon Him by name, as St. Peter declared from the pen of the prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And remember, "[N]o one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) By way of the Holy Spirit, you are convicted of righteousness for the sake of Christ Jesus, your propitiation!

What does this all mean? Well, St. Paul put it most beautifully: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) That is to say that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (cf. 1 Timothy 1:15), and since you are one, He has come into the world to save you. By the work of the Holy Spirit, you hear this and receive it and believe it. "This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." (Psalm 118:23) This is His doing, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: *Du er tilgitt for alle dine synder.*

ahem

You are forgiven for all of your sins!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.