



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for the Day of Pentecost**  
May 28, 2023

## Babel Reversed

### Acts 2:1–21

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; <sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. <sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ “

The solemn feast we’re celebrating today is one that the Church is to remember forever and ever. Sometimes we make the mistake of believing that if something only happened once or twice in the scriptures, it’s not very important. But the day of Pentecost is central to the life of the Church. On the surface, it seems to be the answer to Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations through baptizing and teaching, but there’s more



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to its meaning than that.

The sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was, above all else, the fulfillment of Christ's own words in John 16:7 – "If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." The Holy Spirit given at Pentecost is the uniting of Christ's people to Himself in a way that wasn't possible before His ascension. In fact, it unites His people in a way they hadn't been for a very, very long time.

In Genesis 11, we learn about the tower of Babel. God had given Adam and Eve the command to be fruitful and multiply and inhabit the earth. But, instead of spreading over the face of the earth and populating it with the people of God, they opted for staying put. And stay put they did, becoming numerous and powerful . . . and arrogant. A man called Nimrod eventually rose up and stood against the face of God. He was a great hunter and he was well-named, his name means "we will revolt."

It was Nimrod who instructed the people to build a tower that would reach up to the heavens. From this tower they would exercise dominion over God's creation, replacing God Himself as Lord of all.

At that time the people all spoke the same language. They were united in words and purpose, but in their hearts they were separated from God.

So God Himself came down from heaven to see this tower they were building. He recognized the destruction awaiting these people should they complete their work. So He confused their language – hence the name "Babel" which means "confusion" – and scattered them over the face of the earth, creating the diverse races and languages that we have today.

With advances in communication, today we can speak to one another as no generation before us since the events of Babel. Our words are more united, but our world is more confused than ever. The people marched stubbornly ahead like this throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus was born into a world still reeling from the after effects of Babel. He was condemned by the spiritual sons of Nimrod, and they killed Him. As He hung from the cross, He beheld a lost, condemned, and confused world, even as He paid for their sins – our sins.

Little wonder, then, that we look around today and see massive confusion. Our world is every bit as lost and aimless as that of Nimrod and Babel, as it struggles to understand whether there even is a God, and what such a God has done and continues to do in its midst. The Feast of Pentecost, therefore, is about clarity, about the true purpose of creation and God's involvement in it.

That day the disciples were huddled together in an upper room, and suddenly there came a rushing wind, tongues of fire appeared on them, and they were moved to go



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outside into the street and proclaim the Good News of salvation in Christ to the people who had come from all over the known world to attend the Feast of Booths.

These descendants of God's people, scattered throughout the world at the time of the dispersion, spoke, as you might guess, many different languages. But each one heard the message of Christ in his own language, spoken by those who had never learned it. This is the miracle of Pentecost – not merely the speaking in different languages, but the preaching of Christ to all people, uniting them in the preaching of the cross.

This is the great reversal of Nimrod and Babel. Whereas the people at Babel spoke one language but were lost where God was concerned, at Pentecost the languages were different, but the Holy Spirit preached through the disciples the unifying message of the gospel. What would actually accomplish the goal of Babel was not the revolt of Nimrod but God uniting people from every nation through the preaching of the crucified, yet risen, Christ.

Thus Christ established a new unity: the unity of the Church, and those being united would come to know God through a common faith in Jesus. This flies in the face of the rampant individualism run amok in our day. Popular culture is obsessed with the preeminence of the individual.

Walk down the cereal aisle at your local grocery store and see the outlandish diversity of breakfast cereals. Compare that same aisle to what it was 50 years ago and the difference is astounding. The echoes of Babel resound in our world. Hearts are far from God and the world blindly gropes for its own understanding of things.

Peter rightly quotes the prophet Joel in our text, saying that in the last days God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh; there will be prophesying, visions, preaching, and whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Through the gospel the Holy Spirit comes and pulls people out of their spiritual Babel, the spiritual confusion of our age, and those who were stumbling through life, lost and alone, are suddenly grafted into Christ's body, the Church.

Pentecost, then, is ultimately about the unifying character of the gospel. It's a microcosm of the Church of Christ in the world: one message in different languages, reaching into a lost world and rescuing souls from the road to hell, redeeming the lost and uniting them to Christ. Different threads, one net; different strands, one lifeline.

This is what has happened to you, [dear confirmands](#) / beloved. You have entered into Christ by baptism and the gospel. [Today you are affirming that](#) you are part of something greater than yourself. Certainly, Jesus knows you individually by name and cares for each one of you, just as He cares for all of us individually. But He has not left you alone and isolated; rather, He has made you part of Himself through the agency of the Church. You [now](#) have a place where you belong, a home from which you need never leave. For Christ is your home and His Church is your family.



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Living in Christ, we, who are bathed in the forgiveness flowing from His cross, are a new creation. We're part of something greater that's not limited to a central location like Nimrod tried to do in Babel. We are set apart from the world, but not isolated, we are clothed with the holiness of Christ, but not bound in the habit of the cloister; we are called to community and set in the midst of His love that continues to pour into us through preaching and the sacred meal. We behold this gospel today like leaves blown by the wind. It's in the air that we breathe, it weaves its way through our ears and into our hearts, as the Holy Spirit feeds, sustains, and saves us, together with all believers in Christ, past, present, and future. We are a forever family, united by the Spirit of God in faith and purpose. And we rejoice in our brothers and sisters, giving thanks to God for each and every one. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen