

May 24 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 104:24-34

Acts 2:1-21

Genesis 11:1-9

Sermon *Time to Stop Babbling*

Now the first thing that we usually associate with babbling is the sound of a little child. The sound that it makes as it learns to talk. Sometimes I call that “happy talk”. We hear that sometimes when we have a baby in our midst in the congregation. Usually we see it as sort of meaningless; we see as sort of gibberish. Another meaning for babble is best illustrated by the sound that Charlie Brown’s teachers or parents made in a cartoon special, you remember as wa,wa,wa. It usually means someone who prattles going on and on and sometimes making a dry run point in the story. Sometimes never quite getting to the point in the story at all. Usually it is talk that many times we sort of tune out. A third kind of babble we associate with the known languages of the world. Known languages that we may not understand or take time to understand and so it seems to come to us as confused nonsense. There is a literal gap in communication when each person speaking, speaks sometimes in a different language. This kind of babble is that confused languages that seem to be the kind of speaking that we take from our lesson from Genesis that this morning speaks of.

There is a part of that 11 chapters in Genesis that commentators loosely call, pre-history, that is, events that are not easily traceable to dates or places or times as opposed to stories such as Abraham and Sarah that seem to have some historical connection. This story is also part of those first famous stories in the Bible that you probably heard as a young child in Sunday Schools along with Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark and all those other great stories. Stories that were included in Scripture to help explain the human condition and humanities’ relationship with God. You can also hear a small Jewish child asking her mother or her father at bedtime. “Tell me Daddy, why do people speak different languages?” And the parents turn to the child and say, “Honey, let me tell you a story about that”. Whatever said and whatever are the uses of the story of the tower of Babel, it clearly goes beyond the origins of languages in its meaning, to saying something about humanity’s relationship with God. It begins with premise that all humanity, after the flood spoke one language and congregated in one place to build one magnification city in which to live. And part of the magnification city right in the center was a massive tower which would rise into the heavens and which was to be known far and wide as a great accomplishment of human beings.

God appears in the story to be pretty nervous about this thing and goes down from the heavens to take a closer look at what was going on. And then God reports to the heavenly host the cause concern, the people in their arrogance have built a tower reaching into heavens which will draw fame for themselves. "If we don't watch out, God continues, this will only be the beginning of what they will do. Nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them." Now when I read this initially it seems a little surprising to me because I would have thought that God would have been pretty proud of humanity for such an accomplishment, that they were smart enough, that they were skilled enough to do just this, and that they were able to work well enough to pull this great event off. But God doesn't see it that way instead God is looking at it as one more way of human beings trying to become like God. So God's actions was swift and God's actions were decisive God makes the people to speak different languages and spreads them all over the face of the earth so they can't complete their project. And the name of the place is called Babel which means confusion because God confused the language in that place.

I decided to do some research about this; however, I could never completely connect the word babble in this context with the word in the English word that we use for the word babble. But I can't help but believe that one gets its origin from the other. So this story did a couple of things, as I said before, for the ancient Israelites. It gives an explanation for why there are different people and different languages spread all over the globe. And it gives a stark warning not unlike the stories about the Greek gods the word hubris or overweening pride in its own time and the warning is this, arrogance and pride or even worse is putting yourself in the position of God, will bring you down in the end.

Again why I wonder why this passage is usually side by side with the traditional passage Acts 2 that Sandee read for us earlier about the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. Traditionally one thing that the Acts 2 passage does is, to undo what happened in Genesis 11 as what happened at Babel. Just as God confuses and separates humanity at Babel, in Acts 2, God allows people presence at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to completely understand one another and why? Because in doing a new thing in the coming of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, God does several things. God invites and God encourages. God even insists that people work to get together for the common good; that common good for all Christians is to share God's love with the world.

The lesson then for us as followers of Jesus is crystal clear at this Pentecost season. In Jesus and in the Holy Spirit, God is doing a new and fresh thing. The past is past. God says now is the time to put aside a number of things that have separated churches for centuries; petty arguments, bitterness, divisions all should be put aside so we can work together united for the good of all, to share as one

body the love of God for the entire world. The question remains can we do it? Can we on a daily basis swallow that same pride, on a daily basis bit our tongue before we say something that we are going to be sorry for? Can we on a daily basis put aside our personal agendas in favor of God's agenda? If we can't I guarantee that, all of us, will shoot ourselves in the foot and become just one more club of which to become a member. If we can, we can accomplish great things for God. One-step at a time but together in God's love. So I think that the message of this passage is pretty clear, stop your babbling, stop your babbling and get busy. And together we say AMEN.