

St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
June 9, 2019  
The Reverend Rick Veit

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We learned in both the Original and the New Testaments today of God causing a disturbance with regards to language. Language is one of the places that can connect people, either in positive or negative ways. It can help draw a community of people together or separate them.

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include the city of Babel or Babylonia. “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a great tower, one that would begin on earth and raise up to the heavens.”

Historically, we know that towers in the Babylonian culture, according to their beliefs, provided communication between earthly and heavenly realms. The base was on earth. The top was in the heavens. That is one reason why we have towers in church and faith communities even today, even at St. Mark’s. They give glory to God and they become a pathway to heaven, a “Stairway to Heaven” of sorts. --- Haha. Only people alive in the 1970s would understand that one, a song from a great band – Led Zeppelin. But I digress.

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Next, we learn that the LORD came down to conduct a judicial inquiry, to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. A powerful image, though addressing a people that had gone astray, God cares enough to descend to the earth, to “go down” and deeply engage, not just stay up in some ivory tower. Of course, like with any parent, sometimes He is happy with our actions and sometimes He is not.

When God came down, he found a people united in sin. And they were so powerful that, according to the scriptures, nothing they proposed to do would be impossible for them. So, God goes down and decides to confuse their language so that they will not understand one another’s speech. If they cannot communicate, they will not be unified in mission to practice and expand their mission of sin. Sadly, because of the confusion, they became scattered over the face of the earth.

One shining moment though. Despite their sin, in scattering them throughout the world, God’s message of covenant and relationship spread as well. Through the disruption and mixing of languages, God used them to teach people throughout the world of his care and love.

In a similar vein, in the New Testament, on the day of Pentecost, fifty days past Easter, the disciples were together, unified in one place, though frustrated and afraid. Their Savior had died. They felt abandoned. Things were not going well, probably some fighting and quarreling amongst themselves as they tried to organize the movement of the Way, what eventually was called Christianity. And through this violent wind sound, (something we know well in Wyoming), divided tongues appeared among them, and different languages rested on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in those other languages. Confusion ensued. Bewilderment, amazement, even astonishment occurred amongst them. Some people thought that they were drunk. Not drunk though, but filled with the Spirit. God caused confusion, yet again, just like in Babel, to bring his

message to the world. By giving them multiple tongues and languages, they were able to spread the message of the Gospel, the good news of hope and love and joy, as is God's vision for us at St. Mark's Church – A Growing Community of Love, Joy, and Hope. Through struggle in life, in the darkness, God brings a great light. God takes our sin and turns it around, impacting us and the rest of the world with goodness and love. And, as Peter reminded us in his preaching, in the midst of struggle, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So what does this have to do with us today? First, be aware that God tinkers with the world and with our lives sometimes in order to deliver his message of love and compassion to us and to the world. A common phrase, originally coined in 1902 to describe the important role that newspapers play in society, was, "God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." In 1987, a preacher, Martin Marty, applied it to the Christian faith, particularly in how God is both merciful and judging. Once again, God will deliver his message to us and to the world through his Holy Spirit, despite our shortfalls, despite our failings, even though we sometimes do not love we when should love, even though we will look on the dark side instead rejoicing in the good of our Lord in the world. Despite the sins of humanity, God will prevail. If we are united in sin and hopelessness, God will cause disruption, sometimes even in our language, so that we can return to what is good, what is of God. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

How is God disrupting your lives? Or, put another way, what disruptions are happening in your lives that God is using to draw you back to the Gospel, to hope?

In me, God has used his Holy Spirit through my personal priest, my therapist, through meditation exercises like breathing. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for four, and breathe out for eight. Even the kids are doing this in school. God has used my marriage, my parenting, even my job as a priest to comfort and, at times, to disrupt my life.

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