

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 05.15.16 Pentecost c*

Day One: Genesis 11:1-9

First Lesson: *Genesis 11:1-9*

⁵ And the LOD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so they may not understand one another's speech.

It's comfortable to have a place where everybody speaks your language, isn't it? Ever since Babel, we've all grouped ourselves in little communities that share the same language. More than that, even among people who speak the same language we find that we like to hang around people who speak the language of our career or our hobby. People who can "talk cars" or who can "talk football" love to get together to talk.

But what does it mean that we all speak one tongue? It's actually a sign of our sin. It's a

reminder of our rebellion long ago, and it's evidence of our lack of love for one another today.

It has been said that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in our nation. Christians group themselves by race, by ethnicity, by income. One demographer has said that the LCMS is more "white" than the Mormon church. Why!? If the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, why is only one language spoken in our worship?

The great miracle of the early church was that people of many nations came to the same faith. When we're with people who are different from ourselves there is some discomfort. But there is also wonder and joy. There is learning and growing. There is sacrificing of our own comfort for the sake of entering into someone else's life.

How can you reach out to someone that will bring new things into your life and faith?

Prayer: Lord, my country is a gift from you. Help me to love those of many nations who will worship with me around your throne. Amen.

Day Two: Acts 2:1-21

And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

We often talk about the miracle of Pentecost, that the apostles spoke in many languages which they had not learned. People even today still seek that gift of the Holy Spirit. But I want you to go one step further. Day One was exciting. All those people came to faith in Jesus and were baptized. What joy!

But what happened on Day Two? Did they form one house church of Parthians, and another house church of Elamites? A worship service in Latin and another in Arabic? No! And if you know human nature, you know this is an even more amazing miracle than the ability to speak in many languages.

They met together in homes and devoted

themselves to the apostles' teaching. They were ONE body in Christ! Even though they met in many places, they were one congregation. And it was the teaching of Jesus, through the apostles, that made them one.

Now THAT is a miracle! The gift of languages brought them the gospel and led them to faith, but the gift of love made them one in Christ. It was not easy. Sin continued to try to divide them. But Jesus' love was more powerful than culture and tradition and language.

What if we could see that miracle again today? What if the world looked at our congregation and saw a place where people of all kinds could be loved? What if we could be unified, and show love and concern for one another, even though we worship at different services, or attend different groups?

How could you be a part of that?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how unique are all the people whom you created! Help me to love them all, as you do. Make us one in you. Amen.

Day Three: John 14:23-31

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

When Karen and I bring a suitcase up from the basement our dog starts to become anxious. He follows us from room to room, watching us as we pack for a trip. Why is that?

He has never been left without care. He has never missed a meal or a walk because of our travels. But he misses us. (Our children were never that way. They were thrilled when grandma came to babysit and we left for a conference.)

When we went on a trip, we left behind a page of phone numbers and tips for grandma. But when Jesus left his disciples what did he leave behind? His peace! He left peace with us by sending his Holy Spirit to live in us.

Jesus sent us the Helper, the Holy Spirit. And he is not only a comforter, but he also teaches us all those things that Jesus desires us to know as we serve him. All of that sounds great, doesn't it?

But there's one problem, the Holy Spirit is not as visible as grandma. The Spirit doesn't wake us in the morning and fix us breakfast, as grandma did when mom and dad were gone. The Spirit doesn't lay out a lesson for us, what we are to learn today.

Or does he? In the Church, the Holy Spirit does all these things. The Spirit feeds us, leads us, inspires us, encourages us, challenges us, holds us accountable, teaches us, and helps us to grow up day by day in faith and in love for our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit does what nothing else in the world can do – he changes us. And it is all done through ordinary people like ourselves, our brothers and sisters in Christ around us. We grow together!

Prayer: O Holy Spirit, lead me again today. Challenge me to grow again, to learn and serve, until at last Jesus comes again. Amen.

Day Four: Our small world.

Maybe you're standing in a line. Or you're at a meeting where you don't see anyone you know. For a time you hang back, looking over the group, listening to bits of other people's conversations.

What are you looking and listening for? You're looking for something familiar.

In a foreign country, when you hear your own language spoken you right away find a connection with that person. Even if they are from a city you've never visited, you soon find some commonality.

In a strange place you soon find a person who once worked where you worked, or went to your old school, or shares your profession or your experience or who is willing to see pictures of your grandkids. We always look for someone who is LIKE US.

It feels comforting. And in Jesus Christ we find people all over the world who share the thing that is most profoundly important to us. We find people who, like us, were washed in Baptism by the Holy Spirit. We find people who have eaten of the body and blood of Jesus. We find people who have also

confessed their sins and found redemption in Jesus.

At the same time, we also find people who are very different. Different language, different foods, different professions, different customs, different kinds of families. We find people from whom we can learn because the Holy Spirit has taught them in a different school of experience.

Perhaps it is harder work to meet new people who are not like us, but it is wonderful and exciting to know so many people who share our love for Jesus Christ – and especially his love for us. Have you met anyone knew at church lately? Have you looked? There is an exciting gift waiting there for you to unwrap.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, lead me to discover the gifts you have hidden in my brothers and sisters in Christ. And let me share my gifts with them, so that we may rejoice in our service together. Amen.

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org