

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 5 June 2022

*Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the scriptures are read, and your word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.*

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:25-27

### ***The sound of the Holy Spirit***

Today our focus is on the sound of the Holy Spirit that people heard on Pentecost. We learn that their lives were entirely transformed when they heard the sound of the Spirit by being filled with the Spirit. We live surrounded by sounds, but few sounds would transform us into new beings. There are sounds that may confuse people, and there are the sound of the Spirit that makes people understand the work of God. As church, how do we discern the sound of the Spirit from other sounds? Let's think about it one by one.

### ***Sounds that confuse people***

*The Tower of Babel* seems quite the opposite of *The Day of Pentecost*. Scholars say that Pentecost is not considered a solution to the problem of *the Tower of Babel*. Diversity, including different languages and cultures, is not a punishment from God. For instance, on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit maintains the diversity of human language by enabling everyone to hear the gospel in their language, not in a single universal language. Diversity is something to be celebrated.

The main focus in *the Tower of Babel* is on pride and rebellion against God through a series of actions. First, they aim to build a city<sup>1</sup>; second, they aim to build a tower in the city that reaches the heavens; third, they aim to make a name for themselves. Fourth, they aim not to be dispersed over the whole earth. However, we read in scripture that it is God who blesses people, makes them great, and makes a name for people. In Genesis 12:2, God promises that God will make Abram a great nation; God will bless him and make his name great. Later, God changes his name to Abraham, which means 'the father of many nations.'<sup>2</sup>

In addition, people's desire to remain in one place was also against God's mandate in that they spread out and fill the whole earth.<sup>3</sup> Against God's command, they weren't spreading but clustering. God didn't destroy the city or the tower but confused them as the issue was not with

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 11:4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 17-18

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:28; 9:1: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

the building projects but more about the reasons for building. When God confused them, it was through their language. Even though they were using the same language, confusion and conflicts were inevitable as everyone may have had different ideas and desires. As such misunderstanding and miscommunication naturally followed. They had to go their own ways. Being scattered sounds negative as a consequence of disobedience. But God does not scatter people always. In Deuteronomy 30:3,<sup>4</sup> it is the first of many times when God promises to “gather” from all the places where God has ‘scattered.’ When the Spirit comes, God gathers them all in the truth of God.

### ***The sound of the empowering Spirit***

The reading in Acts 2 offers us to hear different kinds of sounds. In verse 1, we can imagine certain sounds when the people gathered there. There may have been sounds like doors opening and shutting, feet shuffling, the rustle of clothing, and the murmur of voices. Amid ordinary sounds, people heard the sounds of a rushing wind from nowhere. As they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other languages.

In Acts 2:5-11, there are sounds of native languages. At least 16 different places are mentioned, each hearing in their own language about “God’s deeds of power.”<sup>5</sup> Some thought they were drunk, while others were curious, wondering what this might mean. The church was about to be born, which would embrace diversity with different languages by crossing cultural barriers.

In Acts 2:17-18, there are sounds of people empowered and liberated. The Spirit fell upon special people in the Old Testament, uniquely anointed for specific tasks. Here in Acts, the Spirit is much more extravagant. The community gathered in verse 1, young and old, sons and daughters, slaves both male and female, all find their unique voice. There is also the sound of people calling for salvation.<sup>6</sup> There are different types of speech, from the passion of prophecy to the hope of vision. Different from those in *the Tower of Babel*, these voices, vision, hope are to bring God’s Kingdom here and now as well as in Heaven.

We can see the impacts that the Holy Spirit had brought to people. First, the Spirit removed the fear for the Jews, thereby the concerns about their safety. Previously they were hiding in the

---

<sup>4</sup> “Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you.”

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:11

<sup>6</sup> Acts 2:21

upper room while praying together. But when filled with the Holy Spirit, they couldn't stay or hide any longer, but they went out to the street. Second, to live by the Spirit is to live in some sense at odds with 'the world,'<sup>7</sup> the sneers from the crowd.<sup>8</sup> Also, living by the Spirit means to endure the presence of the wicked,<sup>9</sup> and suffering.<sup>10</sup> What does this sound like in our community of faith?

### ***The work of the Holy Spirit working in our midst***

We may find ourselves in both readings. In the Tower of Babel, despite the single language when they failed to see what God was up to, the confusion forced them to be scattered all over the earth. Nowadays, the church is far from spreading but clustering. The world is changing, and it doesn't appreciate the truth of Jesus Christ as much as we do. The voice of the church is rarely heard. People are still searching for the truth and the meaning of life, not in the church but somewhere else. We – believers often choose silence before others simply because we don't want to offend them. We may only want to say something pleasant to hear. Where is the sound of the Holy Spirit?

If we fear for others' judgments, or the culture of the world which is the opposite to the truth of Jesus Christ, we are not in the love of God. As read in 1 John, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love."<sup>11</sup> If we truly love others as ourselves, who could prevent us from exercising the love of God in the world? The Holy Spirit that we have received in Christ empowers us daily. Every day is a new day. The work of the Spirit cannot be confined within the church but beyond. As people of Pentecost, we celebrate this new life. May the Holy Spirit empower us and bless all our work so that we go out to proclaim God's deed of power in Christ boldly without fear, or shame, or uncertainty. Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> John 14:17 - "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:13 - But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 104:35

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:17 -and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:18