

Rev. Dr. Jim Gill

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“Waiting World”

Genesis 11:1-9 Acts 2:1-12 John 14:8-17

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 11:1-9

There are roughly 6,500 spoken languages in the world today. However, about 2,000 of those languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers. According to the story I’m about to read there was a time when there was only one language. Hear the word of the Lord from Genesis 11:1-9.

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS 2:1-12

After appearing to his followers and his family over a period of 40 days after his Resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven. His famous last word to them before he ascended was, ‘Wait.’ For the next 10 days the disciples, and the women, and the brothers of Jesus had been devoting themselves to prayer in the upper room. It was like a huge waiting room filled with 120 people waiting for the power to be the witnesses Jesus had called them to be. Hear the word of God from The Acts of the Apostles 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 14:8-17

Even though Jesus’ disciples spoke the same language, Aramaic, they still had trouble understanding what Jesus meant. In the midst of preparing his disciples for his arrest, crucifixion, burial and resurrection Philip asks a question that shows that he is still has not grasped what Jesus is talking about. Will you please stand for the reading of the gospel from John 14:8-17.

“Wait.” It’s a cruel word for our frenetic, frenzied, whirling, busy world. We are so impetuous and impatient. Why write it when you can phone or text it? Why text it when you can click on the microphone on your smart phone and dictate your message? (of course you have to correct a few words that the “not-so-smart phone got wrong)

We have a hard time waiting. Waiting for the Lord's leading and timing is so hard, but still... Jesus said to do it: "Wait for the promised Holy Spirit." Don't run ahead of God, for if you run without waiting on God, you will run with your own power or worse yet with no power.

Two Sundays ago Simon Pagnaud won the Indianapolis 500. Simon, a native of Poitiers, France, moved to the U.S. 15 years ago to race full time. He finished .2 ahead of the 2nd place driver Rossi. Two years ago new history happened when Takuma Sato took home the checkered flag. He was the first Japanese winner in the history of the race. This year he came in 3rd.

On February 2, 1985, on the beginning of the third lap, at the Daytona 500 Donny Allison’s \$250,000 machine, rolled to a stop on the infield side of the track. When it was checked, they found that the gas tank had not been filled. (1)

You can have the best car in the race, but you cannot win without fuel. This morning's lesson from Acts describes the filling of the disciple's tanks for ministry and mission.

This is the first thing we must notice about the church. The source of our power must be the Spirit of God. Jesus' told his disciples to wait so they didn't go off in their own power. He told them to wait so that when the Spirit did come they would know the difference. At Pentecost the Spirit came. The wait was over. The Waiting room was on fire! What do you do when you're inside a house and a fire breaks out? You go outside. It was a Holy Spirit Fire Drill. Rather than go out into the world first thing on Ascension Day, at Pentecost the Holy Spirit brought the world to them.

Through the history of the church there have been folks that have tried substitutes for the power of the Spirit. Sometimes the church has tried to fill its tank with political power. Our laws regarding the separation of church and state are in some ways beneficial. They keep the state from meddling in church affairs and they help the church resist the temptation of relying on political power.

Sometimes the church has tried to fill its tank with celebrity power. Some churches bring in "celebrities" like musicians, and athletes to share their faith. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as we remember that these celebrities are just people who are sinners just like the rest of us. Any church that builds its faith on the power of "personality," even and especially on the personality of the pastor is going to have problems.

Sometimes the church has tried to fill its tank with program power. Some churches focus on people's needs and develop programs to meet those needs. In many churches today you will find all kinds of 12-step groups and recovery groups and support groups, etc. All of these are good, and they are a vital part of the church's ministry. We are here to meet people's social and emotional and even their physical needs so long as we do not lose sight of our central reason for being.

When it comes to finding the power to fuel our mission, we are to accept no substitutes! Nothing in the church can substitute for God's Spirit as the basic source of our power. If we ever become what God means for us to become, it will not be because of our politics, our personalities, or our programs, as effective as they may be. It will be because the power of God's Spirit fills us.

If you were able to see my article this Thursday I talked about Richard Lederer's books titled "Anguished English" and "More Anguished English." When People magazine did a story on him, their photographer asked Lederer to think about setting up a humorous, posed picture that would somehow summarize his work and lead into the article.

The solution immediately presented itself. On the outskirts of Lederer's town stands a telephone pole with the street sign ELECTRIC AVENUE. Sure enough, right below it is a yellow diamond traffic sign announcing NO OUTLET. (1)

This is the greatest danger for the church, that we will experience God's electricity but that it would be trapped within our walls. The greatest danger is that we will experience God's power but will balk or put off using that power to share God's love with others.

The second thing we learn from the birth of the church is that where God's Spirit is there is unity. Even though there were Jews of differing backgrounds, differing social classes, differing skin colors, differing national origins and who spoke different languages that gathered on that day of Pentecost, they each heard the Gospel in their own language.

The miracle of that day was not only one of speaking but also one of hearing. It was just as much that the 120 disciples were speaking in tongues as those listening to them were "hearing in ears." They are recorded as saying, "How is that we (plural) each one (singular) hear them (plural) in the native language of each (all 120 individuals) speaking in our own language? (all 16 languages)? It was equally a miracle of hearing as well as speaking.

A friend of mine had posted an article about The Pilot from Waverly Labs. It is a device which when placed in a person's ear and then paired with an application on another person's phone allows the person with the in-ear device to hear the other person in their language. The man that invented the device came up with the idea when he met a French girl. In the video he gives her the device to put in her ear. Then he clicked the app on his phone and spoke to her in English and she heard the translation from English to French in her ear. It was the miracle of "hearing in ears" all over again.

Rather than fragmenting into tiny self-serving groups, those believers and those who heard them and responded to their message were drawn into a cohesive whole. Three thousand of the folks who heard the good news of God's love in their own language were baptized and the church was born. One day, we are going to see how petty we have been about all the barriers we have erected between people.

There's one more thing that the Spirit brings. Where the Spirit is there is outreach to others. Where the Spirit of God is, people concerned about sharing the good news of Christ with their family, their friends, their neighbors

If we are serious about asking the Spirit to fall afresh on us, we have to know that it will involve being spilled from this waiting room outside to the waiting world. There are folks in our neighborhoods, in our offices, in our schools, in our parks and playgrounds, in our bars and our Starbucks that have not yet heard that they

are loved by God. They haven't heard the good news of the gospel in their own language.

David Leininger writes, "In the story of the Tower of Babel that we read in chapter 11 of Genesis human pride had decided it would make a name for itself and would build a city and a tower that would be a gateway to heaven. God would not allow such presumption so the speech of the workers was confused, they fell to bickering among themselves, and were dispersed over all the earth, and never did complete the tower. And that is why Germans do not understand French, Italians do not understand Chinese, Greeks do not understand English, and nobody understands teenagers!" Remember On Fleek?

To this day, we have problems communicating with one another. In international relations, translations often fail to convey proper meanings. Multinational corporations learn the lesson the hard way. One man who used to be in the advertising business was responsible for the Pepsi Cola account. He is the one who came up with the slogan, "Come alive. You're in the Pepsi generation." Pepsi tried to market their product in China using the same slogan. In Chinese the meaning came out as, "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead." (2)

The Hebrew name for the festival that we call Pentecost that brought everyone to town that day is Shavuot. It was a festival to commemorate the anniversary of the day God gave the Torah to the entire nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai. Do you see the connection? On the day that Jews from all over the known world gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the giving of God's word to them in Hebrew--God's word was given to them in 16 different languages of their world.

In less than 100 years the fire of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was carried as far as Spain to the west, India to the east, and Ethiopia to the south. It subsequently took several hundred years for the Gospel to arrive in the northern reaches of Europe, but it did. Because it did it came here. Will it continue?

When I was in Odessa serving as their interim pastor we hosted a traveling troupe that performed the musical Godspell. I offered to host 2 boys in my apartment, but a couple in the church who were going to be out of town, offered to let me host them in their house, so I got to play pool till midnight.

While we were playing pool I noticed in the corner that they had an engine from a car that Mario Andretti drove at the Indianapolis 500. It was mounted on display on its own stand, under the TV on the wall. A once powerful engine was reduced to a mere reminder of when it used to race. It went from a trophy winner to being a ... trophy.

The danger is that we would be like Donny Allison with a \$250,000 car and no gas. The danger is that we will become like an engine mounted like a trophy next to pool table in someone's den in Odessa, Texas as a mere reminder of when we

used to race. The danger is that we will experience God's unity among ourselves but shut out others—or shut ourselves off from others. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do far more than we can even imagine, maybe even some things that make a driver from Japan winning the Indianapolis 500 seem not so far-fetched.

When the Spirit fell upon the disciples, the Upper Room could no longer contain them. They spilled outside to where the world was waiting. The disciples weren't the only ones who were waiting. When the Spirit fell upon them the Upper Room was transformed from a Waiting Room to a Delivery Room for the birth of a church that was sent, and today is being sent to a waiting world.

Let's pray. O Lord, with wondrous works and mighty deeds you continue to astound us with your grace and power. Like the rush of a mighty wind you make known your presence, interrupting our complacency, disturbing our lethargy. In hearing the first cry of a newborn, we sense your grace. You dry the tears of those who mourn. You calm the fears of those who face uncertain futures. You amaze us with wonders beyond comprehension. We stand in awe of your majesty and give thanks for your mercy.

Fill us with your Spirit and enlarge our vision. Open our eyes to the future that waits beyond the scope of our finite perception. Attune our ears to your word so judgment so that we may discern our errors and forsake them. When we pursue courses of action that destroy your creation, correct our mismanagement and harness our greed. When we thoughtlessly make decisions that cause others to suffer, convict us our cruelty and help us to right the wrongs.

Make us more daring. Implant your commandments within us so that we cannot mistake your truth. When we grasp after straws and are tempted to waver, balance our uncertainty with your words of wisdom. When we stumble and fall in our pursuit of justice, strengthen our weak knees and set us on our path again. Hear our prayers for those on our hearts.

Thank you Lord that because of Jesus and because of the unity that comes from the sending of the Holy Spirit that we are a part of a Big, a Huge Worldwide family. Thank you that the barriers between races and nations, and languages have been crossed through the power of the Spirit. Thank you for this place from which we launch our witness into the part of the world you have us in. Thank you for the joy we experience inside these walls and for the joy of having an outlet for that joy as we are spilled from this waiting room to our ... waiting world.

- 1) Richard Lederer, MORE ANGUISHED ENGLISH, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc 1993), 113-114.