

“One?”

By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy

Acts 2.1-12

Genesis 11.1-9

June 5, 2022

Chaos. Disorder. Confusion. Some people hate it, some people thrive on it. To one person these may seem like situations where the unknown exists, therefore nothing productive can occur. To others, chaos may seem like a blank slate of sorts, where the creativity can run rampant as they try to make something out of the chaos. I always like to remind people that God created out of chaos. This chaos was not deemed “good” or “bad” – it just was, and God worked through it. We encounter chaos this morning in both our scripture passages.

The chaos in Genesis happens at the end of the passage. Here is this community that is feeling good about itself. They understand each other. They all speak the same language. Wouldn't the world function differently if we all understood? This community decides they want to show who they are and they decide to create this building that will reach up toward the heavens. This place will be their central location. Since they understand each other and things are going great, why mess with greatness? They stay together, perhaps so they can be more efficient.

They have so much going for them – unity, understanding, productivity. Then God looks and says, “Let's change that,” and BAM! They are all speaking different languages! Before God confused them, the Holy One makes some notes about them, saying, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” God recognizes that even though they have this close-knit community and they are building their tower together, and in a sense working well with one another, these people will not be able grow.¹ Their lives would stay the same – and wouldn't be different or interesting or varied at all. No diversity, no change, no growth.

Our book group Wednesday night has been reading a book called *Unsettling the Word*. In it various authors, mostly Indigenous people, reimagine the scriptures from an Indigenous perspective and attempt to decolonize Christianity. This passage is one that is included in this book. Steve Heinrichs wrote this one entitled “The Foolishness of Petropolis.” He writes: “At one time, all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words. *Check*

¹ Douglas M. Donley, “Genesis 11.1-9” in *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 2.

that. Not all the people, but principally the wealthy people and the white people. Those folks and the many they co-opted spoke the same imperial language...”²

What if this was a passage as an allegory about colonialism and power? What if it's spoke about how when we all are the same and we build our towers higher we become the colonial power? Without diversity, without different cultures and different languages we colonize and assume that we are the best. And God looks at that and says this isn't the way. This passage comes right after God has sent the flood and erased most of humanity and most of the diversity of life. So God knows that God is taking a chance in the world being chaotic again. God is ok with entering the chaos.

The chaos of the Spirit happens in the Acts passage. It is a loud noise and a gushing wind. The wind was more than just a sound – it was an experience. And diversity is not just skin color or language but also in how we learn and experience the world. Sometimes we experience scripture best by listening, sometimes by talking, and sometimes by reenacting. So, before we theologically dissect the scripture, I thought we might experience wind first.

So, I have a variety of wind instruments available – I don't mean woodwind, I mean “instruments” that sound like the wind:

- Tissue Paper
- Ribbons
- Mouth Noises

(Experience the “sound” of the wind)

We don't just hear wind – we truly feel it. We not only feel the invisible breeze on our skin, sometimes we can actually feel noise – such as a loud bass booming through a car speaker or the vibrating of the floor when the organ is loud. Noise can be more than something we hear in our ears.

The people didn't just “hear” the wind, they experienced it in all their senses. We notice that the passage includes both “audible and visible” aspects of the wind and flames.³ You can hear wind, but you can see wind when a tree blows or bubbles fly through the air. You can hear fire and sense the heat on your skin. The Spirit is a sensory experience.

Hearing is not just about whether one can sense in the ear, but also about being heard or understood. To hear someone means to comprehend or interpret their meaning. The people heard the wind, and were heard in their native languages. They were understood. They gathered together in a place with a variety of people and were understood. They spoke in their native

² Steve Heinrichs, “The Foolishness of Petropolis” in *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 12.

³ Fred B. Craddock, John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, Gene M. Tucker, *Preaching Through the Christian Year: C* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994), 273.

languages. We might think of different languages we may or may not know how to speak: English, Spanish, French, Greek, Hebrew, or Hindi. Yet, our “native language” might be a culture or a dialect or even a perspective in which we see the world. Native language might also be found in experience.

Someone who has been houseless can speak to that experience in a way that those of us who have not been houseless will never understand. A person who has suffered discrimination can express that feeling in a way those with more privilege will not grasp. Someone who has experienced loss can articulate that loss in a way that someone who has never grieved will not comprehend. I have so appreciated the book on decolonizing faith because it is written from a perspective I haven't experienced.

In some ways, there is a way that our experiences are so unique – understanding is limited by those who haven't faced it. In the same way, our experiences are connected – because we are human and have the same emotions. In many ways, Pentecost is this link – this way of connecting us even though we have different experiences, even though we might feel misunderstood, even though we want to isolate ourselves at times. The Spirit draws us out and binds us together.

When the people realized what was happening, they were amazed and astonished – the typical response to God's work in the world. Just as Jesus had promised, this ruach, or Hebrew word for breath and wind and Spirit, appears. So, the people were in one place and the most unexpected things happen. There's a loud, rushing wind, there's a description of tongues like fire. It is commanding and amazing and maybe even slightly scary.

A colleague of mine, Rev. Bere Gil-Soto, commented on this passage in one of the Wabash Pastoral Leadership Program gatherings. She said: “The hope that we are meant to bring as Christians is not a waiting or passive type of hope. The hope we bring sometimes is uncomfortable and active like the winds of Pentecost that were meant to shake the structures and shake off the passivity of a wait.” That last part is important: “The hope we bring sometimes is uncomfortable and active like the winds of Pentecost that were meant to shake the structures...” This feel good story wasn't feel good at the time. It was uncomfortable. It was necessary. It shook the building, the physical and social structures. The people didn't continue to speak the same language, but had a taste of what the Spirit could do. It helped them see a perspective that wasn't theirs.

Last week we heard about the ascension of Jesus. He left the disciples, and in doing so, seemingly left a gap in their lives. Sometimes we need to make space in our lives for the Spirit. As we imagine the Spirit as a giant, rushing wind, I want you to think about that word – WIND. When someone is tired, we sometimes say that they are winded. Perhaps that is no coincidence. When we are tired, when we are winded, we need to rest and make space for the Wind of the Spirit to revive us.

What is something you need to make space for in your life? Maybe you need to make space for family. Maybe you are making space for mistakes. Maybe you are making space for emergencies. Maybe you are making space for the unexpected. Perhaps it is listening to people who are not like you. When we give space not only in our calendars and in our lives, we give

space to breathe. We respond better when we are rested and filled with the Spirit. In fact, we respond, rather than react.

Our faith is experiential. We live, we learn, we are reminded. Jesus was always reminding and always teaching. Let us celebrate diversity. Let us listen when we aren't the experts (which is nearly always). Let us be open to new experiences of God. May you see God, feel God, smell God, hear God, and taste God in new ways this week. Amen.