

Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

Divine Segregation and Integration - Gen 11:1-9 & Acts 2:1-12

Today scriptures tell both ends of a story. Read together you will get a glimpse into the beginning of the story and the closing chapters. Genesis tells us about the Divine plan of Segregation. God does separate us one from another. Then in Acts we find God coming to our rescue as God's plan for divine integration is lived out in the lives of the disciples.

Gen 11:1-9 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "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. ⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Acts 2:1-12 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, 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, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

In the Old Testament story humanity is segregated by God because of humanities desire to do build a city and a tower that gets them into heaven without the aid of God. The story is about humanities drive to have everything even to master whatever it takes to get into heaven and all of this without consulting or even acknowledging God. Man is determined to live life to the fullest without the interference or help of God.

We were an affront to God. We waged out heads and declared with our mouths that we had no need for God we could do it all without God. So God gives us a bit of a problem. "You think you can build a way to a relationship with me without me. Look if I just cause you to be different one from you cannot even get along." And so God confounds our language and the result is that 1000's of years later we are still segregated one from another. We still cannot get along with others different from us.

It is only in Acts 2 that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, God living in us, that our relationship with one another is finally corrected. The story of Acts 2 is the story of God returning into our lives and because of God's presence we are enabled to be in relationship with one

another again. God allows people of different tongues to communicate and to understand one another fully.

This is not just the story of language separation but of all our separations one from another. In my life in America that has primarily been racial. The thing that separates us most in America today is still racial. We are becoming a country of minorities. With a few short years there will no longer be one racial group that has the majority of our population. The Hispanic culture is the fastest growing, but soon no one race will be a majority.

While America is making strides at becoming more racial mixed, the most segregated hour of the week is 11 A.M. Sunday mornings - worship. What craziness is this? It is the coming of God's Spirit into the lives of the disciples that allows them to finally overcome their relationship with other cultures and colors. Then over time it is within the church we allow ourselves to become the most segregated place in America.

I was sent a really cute story this week that might help us look at our problem.

A Mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife opening a package. "What food might this contain?" He was devastated to discover it was a mousetrap.

Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning. "There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!"

The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said "Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it."

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mousetrap in the house". The pig sympathized but said, "I am so very sorry Mr. Mouse, But there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured that you are in my prayers."

The mouse turned to the cow. She said, "Wow, Mr. Mouse. I'm sorry for you. But it's no skin off my nose." So the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer's mousetrap alone. That very night a sound was heard throughout the house like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey.

The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness she did not see that it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital and she returned home with a Fever.

Now everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient.

His wife's sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer's wife did not get well. She died. So many people came for her funeral the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide enough meat for all of them.

So next time you hear that someone is facing a problem and think that it doesn't concern you, remember that when one of us is threatened, we are all at risk.

Segregation is not a black problem or a white problem, a yellow or red problem – it is our problem, all of us together. It is about humanity not even being able to have a relationship with one another without God's intervention.

Daily as I drive between the parsonage and the church I pass many children playing now that it is summer but waiting for buses or walking to schools. Their faces are predominately darker than mine. While there are some Anglos, most are black.

My dream for St. Paul is that we become the kind of church that is comfortable with Acts 2. We become a church where there is room for, indeed where we work hard at reflecting all those who are part of our community. Last week I had the opportunity of visiting a couple of the Adult Sunday school classes. In the six months that I have been here it was the first opportunity I had to visit with some classes.

As I listened to Susan Hamilton share the lesson for her class it was about this very issue - race relations. As Christians you need to know that the answer does not lie out there in society. Human society has never been able to solve our problem of segregation. It was God himself who has solved this problem and through the presence of God's Spirit within the life of ordinary Christians like you and me.

If God's Spirit can take up residence in a black soul or a white soul or in yellow or red, how can I as a Christian not accept what God has already done in their lives? If Jesus lives in me and he lives in someone else, how can we not be brothers and sisters and remain true to the Christ who lives within us?

We must reclaim what is already a fact in our lives. God lives within me and within people of all those other races – blacks, Orientals, Native Americans. We are all part of the family of God. My hope is that here within the walls of this congregation we may begin to reflect what heaven is going to look like.

Acts 2 teaches us that it is only through the presence of the Spirit of God working within the believer giving glory to God that all humanity is brought together. It is not by human efforts but by the presence of God that we can be brought back together.

Let's get a quick visual review:

Babel	Pentecost
A small city	Global Kingdom
Surrounded by walls	No walls
Intentionally resisted diversity	Diversity integral
Avoided hospitality	Practiced hospitality
Gathered homogenous people	Gathered all people
Tried to make their name great	Made Jesus name great

So which do you want us to be here at St. Paul? People of Babel or of Pentecost? Our behavior, our commitment, intentional decision to allow the Spirit of God to have his way in my life will make a world of difference. If we are to become an Acts 2 church we must allow the Holy Spirit to take up residence in our lives and transform us within.

Do you remember this old children's song? Will you sing it through with me twice as our closing thought and prayer this morning?

Jesus loves the little children,
all the children of the world.
Red and yellow black and white,
they are precious in his sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.