

## Genesis 11:1-9

As we read the story of the Tower of Babel, we might form the impression that God is against progress. If He had simply ignored their tower, who knows how high it could have gone? Does God have something against towers? Nine years ago the twin towers came crashing down in New York City. He could have stopped those terrorists, but He did not. Those towers were seen by the terrorists as a symbol of Western progress. "Whatever you can build, we can destroy," was their message to us. God's message to the people at Babel was much more powerful than that.

Their tower was a monument unto themselves. "Look at us!" is what they were proclaiming by building it. "Look how great we are! We are gods! Forget the name of the God of heaven." "Come," they said, "let us make a name unto ourselves!" The people intended for their tower to be there still today...so that we would pack our picnic lunch every few years and go sit down by their tower and marvel, "Wow, what amazing people they were to build that!"

But if you go over to the land of Shinar today you will not find a tower. It's not there. God stopped their progress. But that tower still stands. In fact, it gets taller every year. It's not in Shinar. Where is it? Inside of us, within our hearts. Whenever we do something for the church and want others to take note of our sacrifice, we are working on our tower of Babel. Whenever we draw attention to our good works, we are adding more bricks to our tower. Whatever kind things we do, whatever offerings we give, because you and I are sinners they are not done with only pure motives. Selfish pride is always there...somewhere. Each of us is actively engaged, whether we admit it or not, in building our tower just as high as we can.

When God stopped the building progress at Babel He forced them to obey. They had been defiant. "Scatter and fill the earth," was His command. "No!" they said in response, "We're staying put. We're going to build our own little heaven on earth right here. Who needs God! We have each other." The defiance of the people, however, was no match for the wisdom of God. He came down and confused their language. Now they could not work together. Now progress was halted. The people were confused. Quarrels would have erupted, fights. Out of desperation the people had to separate. They were forced to scatter themselves over the face of the earth.

What God did to the people at Babel He does to us through the preaching of His Law. And we need it because the higher our tower becomes within our heart, the harder it is for us to see God. The more we see the tower of our good works, the less we see of His good works for us. The more we gaze upon our sacrifices, our accomplishments, the less we trust in His sacrifice for us, what He accomplished for our salvation.

Repent! We need to stop building our towers. Whatever man builds will crumble and decay in time. Whatever we accomplish will one day be forgotten. Humble yourself before God. You and I are no better than the people of Babel. Unless we turn away from ourselves, away from our towers, from all that we think is good within us, we will perish in unbelief.

Many years after the people gathered together to raise a tower at Babel, Peter and the other Apostles gathered together in Jerusalem, and thousands gathered with them. But they were not there to build a tower. It was Pentecost. The only thing that towered over the people there was the cross of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was given. The Apostles preached Christ. The people repented and believed. Nothing of man was raised up that day. Only the cross of Jesus was raised. His saving name was

proclaimed. His sacrifice, His works, His goodness. Pentecost was, and is, about the towering love of God for us in Christ.

The story of Babel is pretty much the opposite of the story of Christ. Babel was about man's greatness. The cross is about God lowering Himself to serve us. Babel is where the people defied God. At the cross Jesus obeyed His Father's will. At Babel the people raised themselves up. At the cross God came down to die for sinners. You, my friends, who have gathered here today are people of Christ, not people of Babel. Whatever tower we have built in our hearts, God tears it down day after day through the power of Baptism and puts there, in its place, the cross of Jesus. Today we saw in little Graham the destruction of Babel's tower, and where it had been in his heart, the cross of his Savior now stands. For each of us God's Spirit does this whenever His Law and Gospel is preached. Through the Apostles on Pentecost and through those who preach His Word today God is building His tower within us; the tower of His mercy, His gifts of grace, His love in Jesus.

Now we know that Satan is opposed to whatever God does. Satan caused the people to defy God at Babel. He caused them to build that sinful tower. But God stopped their progress. Today Satan is trying to stop God's progress. He tries to halt what God is building within you and me. When Christ is preached, Satan puts our attention on other things so we do not listen. When a child is baptized, Satan tells the parents, "It's done; it's over; no need to teach your child about Jesus; no need to bring him to church; baptism is the end, not the beginning."

Satan learns from what God does. God confused the people at Babel to stop their progress, and so Satan brings confusion and division into the church today. To stop what God is building within us, Satan breeds disunity. He pits Christians against each other. He turns members against their pastor, pastor against pastor, member against member. The quarreling and fighting God caused at Babel to halt their work Satan brings into congregations. At Babel the progress was halted when the people could not work together; when they were divided against each other. And so Satan causes such divisions among God's people today.

How are things progressing here at Christ Lutheran Church in Augusta? Is that which God is building within us and through us growing higher and stronger? Or is Satan stopping the progress? Are we united, or divided? Are we working together in the spirit of peace, or is there a different spirit at work among us? Let's remember who we are. Not of Babel, but of Christ. People who live under the shadow of the cross, who joy in Christ's resurrection, who have within us the Spirit given on Pentecost. Since God desires to unite us, why should we build walls? Since God has forgiven all your sins in Christ, how can we not love each other?

Babel's tower is no more. Jesus' cross stands in its place for us. For you, therefore, God comes down not to confuse and scatter, but to show mercy and unite you with Jesus. He comes to you through humble water and words, bread and wine to raise the cross before your eyes, to convince you by the power of His Spirit that you are His forgiven people in Christ Jesus.

Do not walk away from here today with confusion. Leave with confidence. God loves you. He forgives you. He gives His Spirit and all His heavenly gifts to you in Christ. And as you keep coming to hear this good word, God's progress within you cannot be stopped...ever. Amen.