

Pastor T.C. Arnold
The Festival of Pentecost
Genesis 11:1-9
May 23rd, 2010

“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

The 2010 Confirmation class, which sits before us today ready to be received into communicant membership, has had to endure many directional commands from their two pastors and Deacon over the past few months. We told them to do this, and they did it. We told them to do that, and they did it. Not only were the directional commands given so that they would get their work done – do you workbook, memorize your memory work for next week. But some directional commands were about how to act. Keep your mouth shut! Speak up! Read this passage or read this section of the catechism. There can be many different kinds of directional commands and I guess some of them could be confusing. In other words, there are some directional commands that we might have given the confirmation class of 2010 that God Himself may not have liked so much – at least according to Genesis chapter eleven.

For example – here are three directional commands that would seem “God-pleasing” but according to Genesis chapter eleven they wouldn’t be. We have given these directional commands many times to these young souls sitting in the front row: sit still, be strong and reach up (stop fidgeting in your chair, make sure to tough it out by keeping your eyes open, and raise your hand and answer the question). Those would seem like God-pleasing commands any way you slice it. But to the people of Babel, those three commands, be still, be strong and reach up, were not what God wanted from the people. You see, sometimes our language gets confused.

Now, if you are like me, you probably can only understand a handful of what teenagers are saying nowadays. Their language and way of communication is confusing. Not only is all the texting confusing but so is the facebooking, tweeting, the IMing (and if you don’t know what that means – that is what I’m talking about – confusing) and the shorthand abbreviations with which they use to write. It may be confusing to all of you to hear how sitting still, being strong and reaching up could be the opposite of what God wanted those in Genesis chapter eleven to do – but that was exactly the case. Here’s why...

As far as “sitting still” is concerned, the Lord didn’t want those people to stay where they were. Back in Genesis chapter 9 he commanded the descendents of Noah (and all these people were descendents of Noah) to be fruitful and multiply and fill all the earth. That was God’s direct command. But they wanted to “sit still” and not go anywhere. They wanted to make a name for themselves and do it their way, put themselves first and be the force to be reckoned with.

He would not want us to “sit still” either. There is much the Lord would have us do, say, and share. To sit still is a good thing when you’re in church or in a classroom. But we were never meant to be still forever. We have to move and God moves us. Sometimes we like to stay put because we have a bigger name in the places we are most well known. There can be selfish reasons for any of us. But the Lord says – step out and go out. Be with those who may not know your name so that they can know the name of the Lord Jesus.

As far as “being strong” is concerned, the Lord didn’t want those people to be strong in and of themselves. Surely the Lord was not opposed to His own people being strong – in their convictions and faith. But being strong in themselves would take them away from relying on the strength of the Lord.

The Lord would not want us to “be strong” like this either. When this happens, more than our language, but even our life, get’s confused. Being strong in and of ourselves for the wrong reasons will make us insist on doing what is right for me and only me. It will make us insist on living by my own set of rules and only doing what makes me happy. In this way of strength life is centered on self. And I know, kids you especially, have heard that this is the way to live life – a strong and self-centered life. But life is not self-centered. Life is Christ centered. And while we need to be strong in certain situations – our strength comes from the Lord and His strength is what gets us through the day. His strength gets us through life and into the life to come.

As far as “reaching up” is concerned, the Lord doesn’t want our “reaching up” to be the same as those citizens of Babel. Surely the Lord is not opposed to His own people “reaching up” in praises and expressions of thanksgiving and prayer. However, sometimes our reaching up is for the same reason as we heard in Genesis chapter eleven. It’s for the sake of making a name for ourselves. It’s for the sake of building stature and recognition. “Look at me! Look at what I can do! I want all your attention.”

The Lord would not want us to “reach up” in this way. Again, this type of reaching is for showing off and trying to impress, or maybe – with a big tower that stands so high reaching to the heavens – trying to intimidate someone else.

God knows we cannot reach heaven by building any kind of tower. God knows we cannot reach heaven by impressing others, by impressing God, or even by living a good clean life. God is not impressed with the tower. What God wants and desires to do is to come down to all of you. He desires to meet you where you are right now. He comes to us – and such is the evidence of Jesus in the flesh, the Word that is before us and the sacrament we partake.

Confirmation class of 2010 -- where you are sitting right now is not by accident. You are seated close to the place where some of you were baptized. Today is the day we confirm you in your baptism. We aren’t making your baptism more valid by having it not “sit still” any longer. We are not making your baptism “stronger” and we are not making your baptism “reach up” to the heavens by making it more impressive, flashy or complete. But what we are doing goes right along with why we have confirmation on Pentecost, the birthday of the church. Jesus came to those first disciples in Jerusalem and gave them the ability to not sit still – and go out with different languages, to be strong in the faith and in the Word, and to reach up in response to what the Lord had come down to give to them first. Today is a day we remember our baptisms, even recite the words of our baptism, because we are confirmed in the faith. This is Christ’s faith and it is your faith.

Class and members – I challenge you in this faith that we share together – to not sit still with it after we sit still in here while hearing and receiving. I challenge you to be strong – not in yourself – but in the faith that Christ has given you and the convictions He sets on your hearts guided by His Word. I challenge you to reach up. Be here to reach up – not in stature or prestige – but in prayer and praise. God Has indeed reached out and down to you. Nothing is more evident on how God does this than what we heard in the reading about the birthday of the church at Pentecost.

Directional commands are important. They show us what to do and usually for good reason. The Lord’s directional command leads us to this place – regularly. The Lord’s directional command leads us to His table. But it would all be for nothing if He didn’t directly come to us first. He did this in the flesh and in the Word. He did this on the cross of life. May God richly bless and keep all of you on this very special day. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.