

Sermon
June 8, 2025

Genesis 11:1-9
Acts 2:1-21
John 14:8-17, (25-27)
Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Today we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, it has been 50 days since Easter, and we retell the story of the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles and other followers of Jesus. In our story from Acts, we are taken to a festival of thanksgiving for the first fruits of the summer harvest. This day in Judaism is known as Shavuot and it marks not only the harvest festival but also the giving of the 10 Commandments at Mt Sinai.

For us as Christians, Pentecost is considered the birthday of the Church.
I have preached on the Acts reading many times over the years. Today I have chosen to lean into the Genesis reading.

In this story, a group of people have come together with an industrious project.
We don't know very much about these industrious builders. We know that they have migrated together to their settlement in Shinar and that they all speak the same language. They are likely strangers in a strange land. They have formed a working collective in which they have a common goal, which is based on similar values. And also, by their admission, they have a similar fear. New to this land they feel vulnerable.

"Come, they say, "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."

We can sense their fear of being powerless in these words. And it is their fear that is probably the reason that this group of people goes so awry in their thinking and in their actions.
In seeking security through the accumulation of power, they go too far. In seeking security they get caught in a number of traps, traps that are common to all of humanity.

The first is believing that no matter how much power we have, it will not be enough to keep us safe.

The second is that to be truly safe we need to be more powerful than God. Or at least give God a big helping hand. Maybe we can't count on God to save us.

So, the plan for the people of Shinar is to build a tower with its top in the heavens.
In the heavens, they will be Gods.

Now we can read this story today and reflect on it as a quaint tale from some lost ancient time. We could—if this story weren't so relevant to our modern world in its theme.

In our time we have a multitude of examples of humanity seeking to build towers to heaven, to be gods. Humankind has yet to discern that there is one God, one God above all.

It is the First Commandment; I am the LORD your God; you shall not have strange gods before me, that is what this story is about. There is one God. We are god's children. God asks us to direct our lives to the purpose of becoming fully Human. To direct our lives to becoming gods is wrong.

In this story, God saves this group of people from this wrong.

God sees that his beloved children have gone astray in their thinking and their actions.

God knows that without God's intervention, these people are lost. They will continue to make terrible choices.

Without God's intervention, they will continue in their quest for more power, not power from God or in the service of God, but rather as an attempt to heal their brokenness.

As the story ends, God enters into the lives of those building the tower to heaven, confuses their language, and scatters the people abroad over the face of the earth. Thus ends the building of the tower to heaven.

So, if we are not building towers to the heavens, if we are not seeking to be God, but to be with God, how might we go forth?

If it's not a tower that we build, what is it that we are called to create with God and for God?

In reading Bishop Marianne Budde's latest book, *How We Learn to be Brave*, she talks about Stepping up. Not building up but stepping up.

Dear Readers, for direct quotes, please see Bishop Budde's book.

Budde uses a baseball analogy to make her point. Like a baseball player who has been training for months, there's nothing left to do but step up to the plate and swing (p.106).

She says that stepping up to the plate is a choice. And that sometimes when the moment comes, we know that we have the skills, and we embrace the situation with confidence. At other times we feel inadequate and unprepared. (paraphrased, p. 109).

Bishop Budde reminds us that the message throughout Scripture is that whenever God, or life, itself, issues the summon, we might feel unworthy and unprepared, but it doesn't matter. (paraphrased, p.116).

The Bible is chocked full of stories of ordinary people being asked by God to do extraordinary things, things that seem impossible at first glance.

Stepping up to the plate when you aren't ready is the price of beginning, says the Bishop. It's what you must do time and time again when moving toward something important... You show up, take your place, step up to the plate, and swing and miss, and miss,... until one day you make contact (paraphrased, p. 119).

In stepping up, we join with God, we join with God's purpose. We aren't building a tower that ignores God or circumvents the divine. Stepping up doesn't replace the divine with our purpose. Rather in stepping up to God's summons we more deeply become the sacred people we are meant to be.

All of us in this church today are at different places in our life journeys. But we are all called to step up. To step into that sacred space where we stand with our God. And unlike the people who thought they could build a tower to the heavens on their own, by their resources and with their own set of un-godly rules, we seek the helping hand of God. We seek a Godly strength that gives us the courage to step up and we ask for God's wisdom to guide us along a Godly path.

Amen