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11 o'clock am

The Community Church of Issaquah  
Issaquah, WA

## ***“Beginnings: Language”***

Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21

One of the best things about living in the NW is that we might get rain all day long, but we don't have tornadoes. When you grow up in the NW you are prepared for having the ground shake under your feet, but thankfully you never have to be prepared for your house to lift off over your head.

When I moved the South, though, that changed. I heard about how to put your mattress over your bathtub, about what to do when I heard the tornado sirens, and about lots of stories of devastating tornadoes. The story of Pilger, Nebraska's encounter with twin tornadoes a year or two ago especially caught my attention because an absolutely crazy story came out of the chaos: When the twister hit Pilger, 25 year old father of two, Corey Savage, grabbed his kids and ran down to their basement only having time to take a single blanket to protect them all. The tornado directly hit the house, and Savage lost sight of the two kids. When the dust cleared the blanket had been swept away, but his four-year-old and toddler were safe.

But as he emerged from the home, something didn't seem quite right. The house was still standing. A *ton* of damage but still standing. Yet everything was slightly off. Things didn't quite make sense. And then Savage realized. His house had been flipped 180 degrees. The tornado had literally lifted it off its foundations and set back down *backwards*.

Can you imagine?! You emerge from your basement and your front door suddenly opens

onto your backyard. Your kitchen nook now looks out on the view your living room used to have.

***Everything is the same. And yet everything is changed.***

This is exactly where we find ourselves on Pentecost Sunday. Everything is the same and yet everything is different.

You see, the twelve disciples have been sitting around in a house in Jerusalem waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise of the coming the Holy Spirit. Now, none of them really had any idea of what the coming was going to look like, but they knew they were supposed to wait, so they were waiting. And then suddenly there came that eerie whistle of a coming storm and a violent wind rushed through the rooms, overturning chairs and sweeping hair off of faces. The tongues of fire descended and the disciples walked out into a world that has been flipped 180 degrees.

They're still the same people. Sort of. Everything still sounds the same. Kind of.

*Because what has happened?* The disciples go out and suddenly they're speaking with people they should have never been able to speak with: with Egyptians and Medes, with Cappadocians and Judeans, with Elamites and Libyans. They are speaking with people who are divided by culture and by tongue.

These are people who should not be able to

communicate with each other. These are people who *can not* communicate with each other.

These are a Babel people. A people of the diaspora, spread out, disconnected, confused and separated.

So what exactly happened at Babel that began this cascade of miscommunication? Why did we end up like this? Our inability to communicate isn't just across language lines. It's across political party lines. It's across denominational lines. It's even across the dinner table. So much of our lives are spent stuck speaking only to those on our side of the lines who speak our own languages.

**Lines began at Babel.** Scripture says that before Babel “the whole earth had one language and the same words.” Humankind was unified in their communication, speaking and being understood. But here's the thing: that communication was destructive. As the tower grew taller and taller we were trying harder and harder to be what we are not—and what we can never be: God.

We thought that we could build a building so tall that it could bring us to heaven. We thought that we could get into heaven through our own efforts. We thought we could be big men and women. We thought that if we could build a building tall enough and plaster our name on the side of it in big letters, we could defeat death by being remembered forever.

Babel is a continuation of what Adam and Eve did back in the garden: refusing to be God's creatures and wanting to be their own Creators.

It's like we've forgotten in all of our tower-building that the world was created by wind. In the beginning, the Spirit, in Hebrew the *ruach*, the wind moved across the face of the waters creating the world. We build our towers tall and strong and forget that the taller we build the more the wind blows. The more we're at the mercy of things that are beyond ourselves. The more our buildings have to be ready for a wind that we have to flex with or be shattered.

But here's the thing. God wasn't done with Adam and Eve. God wasn't done with Cain. God wasn't done with the world during Noah's time. And God is done with these Babel people.

At Pentecost that wind comes again. That wind comes revealing that it is God who is the Creator, not humankind. Because who does the decisive action? The disciples are just sitting around: a bit lost and confused. It's the wind and the flames that do all of the hard work. It's the wind and the flames that overcome the separation and the silence. It's the wind and the flames that shake off the dust of ill-begotten ideas and attempts to secure ourselves and instead shatter our self-conceptions and sends us out into the world with a mighty, holy shove.

The rest of the book of Acts documents a people who aren't building towers, but who are being blowing by the Spirit out across the world. People are being moved out of their comfort zones into doing things they never would have imagined they ever would do. Despised eunuchs are given spiritual blessing. Devout Jews eat unclean animals. Gentiles are welcomed into God's chosen people. The world is same and yet the wind

of the Spirit is lifting up lives and setting them down going in the opposite direction. It is so different of a difference that in Acts 17 the people of Thessalonica will attack the believers yelling, “These are the people who are turning the world upside down” (17:6).

The name for this sameness and yet profound difference is revelation. Revelation is the revealing, the uncovering, the pulling away to show something NEW. Revelation is something only God can do. It’s the world, it’s just the world upside-down. It’s Creation, but it’s the NEW Creation. It’s the beginning that is the new beginning.

Revelation is nothing less than Jesus Christ whose Spirit we have given in order to change our lives forever, to send us out, to make us part of God’s new Creation. Revelation is joy—joy at the fact that we no longer are divided, but that in Christ we have been brought together.

Acts testifies that this joyful wind of the Spirit pushes the disciples toward people they never thought they would be friends with and to places they never thought they would go. The Spirit comes and the disciples are swept out of the Jerusalem house and into the ends of the earth.

Now most of us, we haven’t been called to be missionaries to India or Kazakhstan or Siberia, but I bet each one of us has a story about a time when the Spirit moved in our lives and sent us out to an unexpected place. Maybe for you, that unexpected place has been an unlikely friendship, or maybe it’s been a vulnerable sharing of a deep part of yourself with another person, or maybe it’s actually been becoming a part of this gathering called the Community Church of

Issaquah.

Wherever your calling takes you, being called by the God revealed in Jesus means that knowing all your bible memorization verses isn’t enough. Knowing with our minds that Jesus lived, died and was resurrected on the third day isn’t discipleship. Being a disciple of Jesus means that our **whole lives** are to be taken up in Jesus’ life. It means that we live and move and have our being in the new life that streams from the empty tomb. It means that we become **living** witnesses of the grace of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I recently ran across an article about Pope Francis. I think we all know Francis as the very charismatic, always-there-with-the-zinging-one-liner, reform-minded current pope. But he wasn’t always that way. In fact, if you look through old pictures of him before his days as pope, it’s actually kind of hard to find a picture of him smiling. The article said that “When he did have to take the public stage [before becoming pope], friends would call him “shy” and critics “boring.” Even his sister has commented on Francis’ change joking, “I don’t recognize this guy!”<sup>1</sup>

So what happened? Where did this transformation come from? Well, the night before his ordination as pope, something happened that some can only describe as a miracle. Francis says, “On the night of my election, I had an experience of the closeness of God that gave me a great sense of interior freedom and peace... and that sense has

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<sup>1</sup> John Allen Jr. “What’s really miraculous about Pope Francis?”  
<http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/03/07/whats-really-miraculous-about-pope-francis/>

never left me.”

That is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit who comes like a mighty wind through our lives making people who are shy bold and making those who are afraid fearless. Pope Francis is a picture of what it might look like to be able to flex and change when the Spirit comes.

Now maybe we won't have a mystical experience on the night of our election to the head of the Catholic church, but what being a Christian means is that we always have to be open to the movement of the Spirit. We always have to open to a God who likes to pick things up and set them back down upside down and inside out.

In the church calendar Pentecost is the last day of Easter. It's the “pente” (the fiftieth) day after Resurrection Sunday, and it's no mistake that this is where the end of the 50 days takes us: to blowing wind and tongues of fire. Because if we're worshipping the *risen* Lord, it means we're following a God who is alive...and more than that, is alive and *changing things*.

We have to be prepared to be changed. We have to be prepared for our homes to be lifted off their foundations and set back down with a different direction. We have to be prepared for a God who is taking up all things to Himself, reconciling the whole world through the work of the Spirit.

So as we go to sit in our homes enjoying our Sunday lunches, let our hearts be open. And maybe, just maybe, in the twinkling of an eye, we'll walk up from our basements, blink in the sunlight and all the world will have been changed. Amen.