

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR JUNE 5-6, 2022**

The whole earth had one language and a single vocabulary. ² As people traveled in the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there. ³ They said to one another, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used mud brick instead of stone for building material, and they used tar for mortar. ⁴ They said, “Come, let’s build a city for ourselves and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let’s make a name for ourselves, so that we will not be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people were building. ⁶ The Lord said, “If this is the first thing they are doing as one people, who all have one language, then nothing that they intend to do will be too difficult for them. ⁷ Come, let’s go down there and confuse their language, so that they cannot understand one another’s speech.”

⁸ So the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ It was named Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:1-9 EHV)

What’s wrong with building a tower? After the great flood of Noah’s time destroyed all but Noah’s family, world population began to increase and people began to move eastward. At the plain of Shinar, (later Babylon, today Iraq), some decided to settle down, build a city and tower.

What’s wrong with building a tower? Nothing. We’ve got a tower on our property, the cross on the top of the building must be 50 feet high. There are hundreds of towers/skyscrapers in any metro area. Throughout the world, there are tens of thousands; some of you have been in the world’s tallest buildings.

So, what’s wrong with building a tower in Genesis 11? Nothing. The problem wasn’t what they were doing, but why. God’s command was for people to fill the earth – to settle here, so close to the cradle of civilization seems to defy that directive. Also, listen to their motives: **“Come, let’s build a city for ourselves and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let’s make a name for ourselves.”** (v. 4)

Pride, selfishness, self-glorification. There’s nothing we can’t do! Satan’s lie from Eden was alive and well. “We can be like God!” Glory to man in the highest! Can you believe that there was once a time and a place on earth where people allowed human intelligence and pride and accomplishment to make them feel arrogant and superior? Isn’t that a strange thing? We’ve come so far...or have we?

Again, what’s wrong with building a tower? In and of itself, nothing. Just as there’s nothing wrong with getting a higher-paying job, a bigger house, a richer portfolio, increased status at work and in the community. The question is, Why? Why do we do the things we do? Is pride involved? Any selfishness, self-glorification, self-promotion, self-gratification? Are we looking to build a monument to self, to achieve some sort of legacy? As surely as the four seasons come and go here in the Northwoods, so our sinful nature lives by the motto, “Glory to man in the highest! Glory to me!”

One of the things that can lead us away from God also happens to be one of the greatest blessings of our time – technology. Nothing wrong with technology by itself, the growth in this area is stunning, beyond our ability to keep up. Consider this: In 2010, Eric Schmidt, who was CEO of Google at the time, said we create as much data every two days as we did from the dawn of man through 2003. (Repeat) It’s even more now: a 2018 report suggests that 90% of all the world’s data was created in just the past two years. Mind-boggling. Yet, puny, tiny, small compared to the vastness of God – something humanity tends to forget.

Again, there’s nothing wrong with technology, but when our faith and hope and trust are in our tools, when we use technology to reach up to the heavens, to amass fame and fortune, to seize control of our destiny and shake our fist at God and say, “We’re coming for you! We’re on our way to being like you!” then we’re involved in idolatry, specifically, “technolatry.”

Which is exactly what the people at Babel were guilty of. They had the latest in high-tech and the skills to use it. By using baked bricks instead of stone and tar for mortar, they were at the leading edge of technology at the time. Bricks meant independence, self-sufficiency. With stone, you were limited. You could only build where there was stone and you could only build so high. But with bricks, you could build anywhere you wanted and as high as you wanted – the sky was the limit.

But God was in control. He stopped the building of the tower. There's a note of humor in the text. They're building a tower that will reach to the heavens, that will say to the world, "Hey, look at us!" What does God do? He has to come down. From his throne in heaven, he can't see what they're doing. He's on Google Maps and he keeps clicking the zoom button, but nothing's showing up. Even "Street View" isn't showing much. So he has to "come down" to see what they're doing, the project is so small and minute.

God really didn't leave his throne. He wasn't really worried that ***"nothing that they intend to do will be too difficult for them."*** (v. 6b) He sees the pride, the sickness in human hearts, and he confronts it here. He stopped the building of the tower. He doesn't topple the tower or melt the mortar or send an earthquake. To this point in human history, there had only been one language. Here, God confused their language and tangled their tongues so they couldn't understand each other anymore. The place was called Babel, a Hebrew word which means "to confuse." Babel says it all. And ever since, mankind continues to **BABEL ON...**

Technology can't save us. Our tools and toys and towers can't lift us to heaven. Only God can. Which brings us to Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival held in Jerusalem fifty days after Passover. We heard about it in Acts 2. The city was packed with Jews from every nation under heaven. The sound of a rushing wind and tongues of fire on the apostles' heads signaled an unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Most amazing: the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in a variety of languages, breaking through the babble of Babel, in a sense. The different languages remained but everyone heard the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection in his own native tongue.

The miracle of Pentecost said to people, "This Jesus is for you. He isn't only for the Jews, or for the Hebrew people. He died for you, for your sin. He is your Savior. He conquered death for you. He reigns at God's right hand for you. You can be sure of this because you're hearing it in your own native language.

It's at this point that the sermon from this pulpit will differ from sermons delivered from various other pulpits today. Some congregations would hear at this point that it's up to you to complete this work of salvation, that there are 1000 steps between you and God; God takes the first 999, it's up to you to take the first step or last one. If that's the case, we can tear Acts 2 and Pentecost out of the Bible. If that's the case, we can remove every reference to the Holy Spirit and his work from the Bible.

Why would we want to appeal to the spirit of sinful man to do this work? He/We can't. It's up to the Holy Spirit to complete this work of forgiveness, that is, to open ears to hear and hearts to believe it. At Pentecost, the Spirit undid what Babel did. Babel resulted in people speaking many different languages and living in different parts of the world, making communication and mission work difficult. But Pentecost produced a unity of faith among people of different languages through the common message of salvation through Jesus Christ, which is the same in any language: Jesus died for you and me.

The same is true today. The forgiveness of your sins, won by a man who spoke Aramaic and Hebrew, preached by apostles who also spoke and wrote Greek, has come to you in your own language. That's God's gift to you. There's no more personal way of saying Jesus is your Savior from sin and death than to say it in your own language. That's the "for you" of the Gospel. It leads us to say and to live the words of the Christmas angels, "Glory to God in the highest."

That's why our church body sends missionaries throughout the world to reach people in their own native tongues. That's why we don't use Thees and Thous or the 1888 German Lutheran hymnal or the 1941 hymnal – that's not the best way to communicate to people today in America in 2022.

That's why we offer multiple services – Sunday, Monday – and multiple points of contact with God's Word – Bible classes, online touchpoints through YouTube and social media. It's why we have a Lutheran elementary school. We're not asking, "What do I like? What do I want? What makes me comfortable?" But "How do we reach people? How can we reach more people with the Gospel in more ways more often?" And as we seek to do this, we always ask, "What gives God glory?"

Perhaps it sounds like I'm babbling on, but not in the spirit of Babel in Genesis 11. May our babbling/speaking revel in and be faithful to the spirit of Pentecost. O Lord, open our lips and our mouths will declare your praise. Glory, not to man...glory to God in the highest!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
Minocqua, WI