

WELCOME TO...

The Presbyterian Church of Saint David

May 15, 2016



Prelude

Call to Worship: *In the name of God, who created us, who holds us and the whole world in his hands. In the name of the Son who came into the world, who reconciles us with God. In the name of the Holy Spirit who fills us with eternal life, who links us with all Christians and incites us to peace, we come together to offer our thanks and praise.*

Hymn: Deep in the Shadows of the past **510**

Opening Prayer: *Almighty God, as we gather in this place to worship you, we know that all across the globe, men and women, children and youths, gather as well to be your church in all times, in all places, in all languages, in all cultures. Pour out your Spirit upon your church universal,*

that all who gather in your name and all who praise you may feel your presence, know your will, and have the courage to do what you are calling us to do. We pray in the name of the One God. Amen.

Hymn: We are one in the Spirit

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Confession: *God, we yearn to be a community of believers, united in your Spirit. And yet we are fraught with divisions: denominational, political, theological. We are weighed down by tensions and the things that break us apart. Forgive us, great God, for this great sin. Help us to learn to live in community together, loving one another, in spite of our differences, and respecting one another in everything that we do and say. Help us to be as you call us, one in heart and mind. Only through the grace of your son, Jesus Christ, can we achieve this. Amen.*

Genesis 11:1-9: A Deceptive Unity Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that they were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Taize Teaching: Our story begins with a technical advance: people have learned to make bricks. Immediately, they use this new technology to strengthen their unity and their autonomy. Cities, in the Book of Genesis, are places where people hide behind walls to protect themselves, since they no longer feel in harmony with the whole earth (see Genesis 4:17). And building on the plain a tower “that reaches to the heavens,” just like one of those high mountains where people used to go to encounter the divinity, is an excessive act whereby human beings imagine that they are the Source of life.

Under these conditions, the unity they so deeply desire is perverted from the outset. Significantly, it is expressed in negative terms: “...so that we may not be scattered...” People prefer to be strong by standing side by side in an attitude of opposition to what is outside, rather than

to fulfill their mission to receive and communicate God's blessing: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). Note that the story offers no positive reason for this attitude of self-defense: it is as if, with no real enemies, humans feel obliged to invent imaginary ones to strengthen their identity "against someone else."

At that point God enters the story, first as an observer. He finds that a unity imposed "against others," and implicitly in rivalry with him, God, does not correspond to the reason for which he created them. For that reason he decides to bring their foolish plans to naught. His desire to keep humans on the right road is once again seen as a punishment. Blinded by their apparent power, the builders of the tower imagine that by scattering them, God is acting against their aspirations. In fact, he is protecting them from the consequences of their illusion. Their inability to communicate will have a positive and paradoxical result: it will lead them to fill the earth and develop to the full all their potentialities. After a long detour, the human desire for unity will be achieved unexpectedly, in a way that is a thousand times better. The miracle of Pentecost (see Acts 2) displays a unity which, far from being a forced uniformity, is a communion in diversity, retaining all that is valid in every nation and in every person. Such unity without violence is cannot be the result of human activity. It can only be received as a gift, one brought by the Spirit of God arising from the depths of the human being. The project of Babel ... becomes the symbol of all human totalitarianism; it represents a pursuit of efficiency which skips steps and neglects the necessary times of ripening.

- ▶ Must technological progress and the search for efficiency always work against listening to God and caring for others? What enables us to combine these two realms? Where does social media fit in?
- ▶ What is the difference between uniformity and unity? What examples do we know of a life together that does not abolish diversity?
- ▶ In what ways does the story of Pentecost (Acts 2) form the counterpart to this text?

Hymn: O for a world where everyone

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Invitation: *As we gather around this Table, we would come, not as strangers but those who are called into Christ's community of steadfast love and faithfulness. God has poured out the Spirit of strength upon the bread which is broken for us, the cup offered to us, if we but gather in faith and love. We do so remembering that we, although many, are one body in him.*

Hymn: One bread One body (1-2)

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Prayer of Thanksgiving: *Rejoice in the Lord always. Shout out his name. For God is with us. Our God is with us... the God who turns us around and offers us new life. Rejoice in the Lord always Shout out his name* (we continue in prayer) *Pour out your Spirit upon the gifts of remembrance and the people who gather. As the grain once scattered in the fields and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside are now united on this table in bread and wine, so, Lord, may your whole church soon be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and power, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Amen.* From the *Didache* (2nd century).

Hymn: One bread One body (3-4)

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Communion

Following communion *We thank you gracious and generous God for the cup of salvation, for the bread of life. Filled with your Spirit may we go out and walk the path of unity and community to the glory of the name of Jesus.*

Hymn: May the Lord bless you

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*Go out! Into a world that needs our life, our breath, our spirit!
Go out! Into a world that needs the Spirit of God, carried on our lips and in our loving arms. Go out! Into the world to live as God's resurrected people! Go out: and go on the breath of God's holy wind and spirit!*

Postlude