

Faith Through Adversity

Genesis 11:1-9 and Acts 2:1-21 | Pentecost Sunday | June 8, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my siblings in the Holy Spirit,

I love the story of Pentecost. Of travelers descending from all over the known world on Jerusalem to celebrate a festival, only to receive the Holy Spirit and then to hear the story of Jesus, in their own language.

It's mind-blowing how the word of Christ was able to spread. Like wildfire.

I often say that my interpretation of the Bible is that it's God's people making sense of God. The Pentecost story is one of those moments in the early church where the presence of God is so overwhelming that we see how the message of the Holy Spirit spreads.

There are many other times in the Bible where the message of God is explained through story on how humans try to make sense of God.

In Genesis, we turn to the **garden** (tree) and explain why sin exists. We look to the flood and see the promise (**rainbow**) that God won't wipe us all out—through a rainbow. And we hear of the tower of Babel (**tower**) and it helps explain how differences in race, language, and ethnicity are part of our world.

⁹ Therefore it was called Babel,^[b] because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

How do the people understand God? They're confused. How come we don't all understand each other? Why do you look different or speak differently? Must be God's fault and we don't get it.

But, it's also a story about attributing “consequences” to human actions for this to happen. Why are the people confused?

They tried building a tower to God—to the heavens—and make a name for themselves.

Humans want to be in control. We want to dictate terms with God, not the other way around. While some may see the consequences of the tower of Babel as punishment, I see it as gift.

Sermon Transcript

Our world is unique, full of different and beautiful cultures and traditions. Because of those differences, humans historically have fought or shunned others.

We try and try to overcome our own biases, prejudices, and stereotypes, but humans keep falling short. If only there was a way for humans to get the hint.

Pentecost was one of those moments. It certainly didn't "solve" the diversity—as if that is a problem that needs to be fixed.

But Pentecost was a moment where God spoke to people of many cultures and creeds. Did you notice a slight modification to the reading this year?

Pastor Kay Rohloff updated the reading to indicate the current locations of where people came from to celebrate.

It's different to hear Afghanistan and Turkey... Egypt, Rome, and Saudi Arabia. It puts us in the story. These are real places, some with real conflicts, some in places that we, as in the United States, have travel bans placed upon.

Our world is real. Messy. We don't always remember to view our neighbors with love? Often the bigger narratives can dominate our opinions of others.

How are we doing at stopping and meeting our neighbor?

That's why the Pentecost story strikes me as being so unique—because those travelers to Jerusalem would've had no business talking to each other.

Because they couldn't.

They would've kept on sticking to those who were like them, until the Holy Spirit breaks through that barrier. Now, there's a message to be shared. Strangers become fast friends, but then return to their homes with new stories to tell.

Stories of God at work in the world.

So, what is God doing now? Where is the Spirit leading us?

Through prayer, we lift each other up. Like Rachel Trapp. You've heard her name in prayers for a long time, but I have a hunch many of those gathered today haven't met her.

Her brother, Kyle, plays guitar and sings. Yet, during our times of prayer, we don't always tell you what's going on.

Sermon Transcript

Rachel, who is here today, is in her late 20's. Before she was born, the outlook was grim. Even in those first few months, the quality and quantity of her life weren't expected to be long.

Her kidney function was not sustainable. She's been through a whole lot. Lots of prayer, lots of struggling with why, lots of challenges that test that faith that she's rested upon.

I asked her to share her story—about what's happened to her since April. And also, how has faith played a role what she's gone through. It's truly Holy Spirit led.

VIDEO

Rachel had shared her story a few weeks ago and then noticed that it had been taken down. She posted about it on social media and this prompted my request. Rachel, is it time for you to tell us about what you've gone through?

She agreed.

Rachel, thank you for your story. We celebrate with you the successful kidney transplant and the new quality and outlook on life that you enjoy.

Thank you for opening yourself up to letting others walk with you—complete strangers, people have come into your world from all walks of life.

It's the Holy Spirit at work.

It's also a reminder that we rely on each other. There is so much goodness in this world. There is so much that we can accomplish together.

We can break down stereotypes about race, ability and disability, about sexual orientation and gender, we can tell stories that educate others about age and ethnicity.

We, the church, can bravely share the stories, TODAY, about where we see the Holy Spirit at work in new and beautiful ways.

Pastor John Anderson from South Dakota, wrote:

“At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit blows open the doors of that single house where all the disciples are gathered as one, sending them out into the world. **At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit preserves, affirms, approves, and celebrates the sacred beauty and worth of diversity, birthed at Babel, in all its manifestations**

Sermon Transcript

and works through it to begin scattering and sharing the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

There is not a single story in the Bible where a person is able to make a way to heaven by their own power or effort.

Human efforts are destined to fail. There was nothing we could do to make our way “up” to God, so God came down to us. At Babel. At Pentecost. And still in baptism, in the Spirit, in the bread and the wine, and in countless other places. God is a God who comes down—and in doing so, lifts us up from trouble and despair, and ultimately, heavenward.

Rachel said it. You gotta have faith.

Faith that the Spirit surrounds us. Faith that God is with us. Faith that we can rely on each other—to overcome our differences and bring the gift of the love of Christ, to our world. Amen.