

## Mission of the Holy Spirit

*Acts 2:1-7; 36-39 ~ February 5, 2017 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church*

Today we are talking about the Mission of the Holy Spirit. Were you aware that the Holy Spirit has a Mission? We are probably aware that the Holy Spirit was sent into the world. Jesus promises that he is leaving so that the Holy Spirit can come. And it is important to come to a conscious understanding of how the Holy Spirit comes to us. But there is more to this business of the Holy Spirit's coming than a simple travelogue. Jesus and the Father have sent the Holy Spirit into the World for a purpose. It is this purpose that actually constitutes the Mission of the Holy Spirit.

So what is the mission of the Holy Spirit? Peter Sums it up for us when he quotes the prophet Joel on the occasion for our Sermon Text for today. He says,

***'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.***

This is the Holy Spirit's Mission. It is a description of the Christian Church which the Spirit is sent to create in the world. That's the Mission. It is a mission to Created a new reality in the world where the Holy Spirit brings the human race together around God's word. Prophecy, visions, and dreams are the stuff of the Word of God. They are written for us on the pages of Scripture, but by the Holy Spirit's power they come alive for us in everyday life. Through them the Holy Spirit creates faith. He creates faith that saves. He creates faith that learns. He creates faith that serves. And through this faith creating mission the Holy Spirit strives to bring humanity together unified under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

To better understand this Mission of the Holy Spirit we need to remember that God's purpose has not always been to bring unity. In fact I can think of a time when the Spirit's Mission was the opposite of Unity. I am talking specifically about the Tower of Babel. It was a really big project. The Bible says that the tower of Babel was built out of Kiln dried bricks held together with something they call bitumen which is a tar like substance that dries like asphalt. On the whole it was a pretty solid way to build a tower. There were actually many ancient tower shaped temples called Ziggurats built in this same general time frame. They were built with the same construction methods the Bible describes for Babel's tower. Some analysts suggest that the tower at Babel may have been over 300 feet tall. Considering that the tallest brick building

in the world today is 16 stories high or about 197 feet, the Tower of Babel was a fabulous accomplishment.

Now to be precise, there is not anything wrong with a human mission to build a tower. It was not tower construction that created trouble for the people in Babel. It was making the project into a religious enterprise designed to engineer glory for humans at the expense of God's glory that was the problem. Scripture reveals these motives in Genesis 11 verse 4:

***Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."***

A tower with its top in the heavens could have been an avenue to heavenly glory. But the purpose of the Tower of Babel was not communion with God. They had no interest in a mission to serve God. The purpose for this great enterprise was for the builders to make a name for themselves. They were out for worldly fame and glory. The mission was focused by human rebellion against God. It grew out of the basic sin in the Garden of Eden. The tower was a symbol and an expression of that rebellion.

So it was not the mission to build the tower of Babel that was wrong. It was the purpose and the spirit that was at work in the mission. Rebellion against God can fuel mission just as much as the desire to serve God. Satan can inspire mission just as much as the Holy Spirit. We should never become glassy eyed and compliant just because the concept of mission is in place. We need to ask what the underlying purpose is for any mission and what spirit is at work in it. Here is what God did about the wrongful mission to build the Tower of Babel:

***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.***

Now God had very little trouble stopping the Tower of Babel. He simply touched the minds of those involved and they suddenly began to speak different languages. At that instant the teamwork ended because communication stopped. The arrogant people who had loudly gathered in one voice for the conquest of heaven, quietly dispersed across the earth speaking in many different tongues. This judgment of the many tongues has stood over the whole human race for countless generations. It was a sign of God's verdict against arrogance and overweening pride down to that day when God's spirit was poured out upon Jesus' first disciples. At that moment God reversed what he had done at Babel and His true mission in the world became apparent! We read in Acts 2:

***When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each***

***of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***

The Apostles had been charged with the mission of going and making disciples of all nations. Starting in Jerusalem they were to witness for Christ in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. It was an impossible mission. It was impossible in scale. How could the church preach the Gospel to all the people of the world in so many different languages? The mission was impossible in scope. How could the tiny group of apostles move out into such a big world divided by so many different cultures? The very nature of Christian mission is that it is impossible. It is impossible for us. But it is not impossible for God.

That is the primary difference between the Tower of Babel's mission and the mission of the Holy Spirit. The Tower of Babel was an arrogant human mission which God made impossible. The mission of the Christian Church is a humbling divine calling made possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost God sends his Holy Spirit to give the church the power and resources it needs for mission. On Pentecost the same babbling, shouting, and confusion is heard that happened on the day the Tower of Babel mission died. But on Pentecost the noise and confusion was the beginning of mission not the end of it. In Pentecost God reversed and undid his judgment from the Tower of Babel. Listen to how Acts explains this:

***Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?"***

Since that day the impossible mission of the Church of Jesus Christ has moved ahead with amazing power and affect. The New Testament was written to record and preserve the apostolic witness and to guide the work of the Church. Martyrs died to spread the Gospel. Missionaries found their way into every nation of the world. Today even as we see the decline of Christendom in Western Civilization the Holy Spirit calls us into mission more than ever. The need to witness to the Gospel is the same today as it was on that day of power so long ago. The Power of the Holy Spirit moves here today as it did on that first Pentecost. We have missionaries to send and work to do. But no matter what you see in your papers, or hear on your television, God is mightily at work in his world today. Christianity is growing like wildfire in places that were completely dark to the light of the Gospel a generation ago. For instance on the Continent of Africa today about thousands of people turn to Jesus and become Christians every single day. The Church is growing faster in the world today than any time in history. God's Holy Spirit is blowing through his church and raising up missionaries for Jesus. Each of you is a missionary in your own way. I challenge you to ask your lord what he is calling

you to do. I challenge you to open yourself to the power of God's Spirit to send you into mission. I challenge you to explore the gifts God has given you and to put them fully to work as together we tackle the totally impossible Mission our Lord has set before us. May we hear His call and depend on the power of the Holy Spirit alone as we move into this mission. Amen.

The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.