

Genesis 11:1-9
John 14:8-17

How Can He Say That? Pastor Dennis Plourde

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Now this may sound, well, stupid, but one of the hardest things for us to adjust to in the Philippines was that the dogs did not understand English! I mean are not “woof” and “arf” universal? But when we would say “stop” or “stay” the dogs did not understand us. Thus, one of our first priorities was to learn “dog.”

The contrast between our two Scriptures for me is that Pentecost is the beginning of the reigning in of the chaos that began at Babel. The world is pushed into chaos at Babel. Different languages confound and push the world into chaos. There is an inability to communicate with one another. On the island where we did most of our work in the Philippines there are four distinct languages and several other dialects. We could drive less than an hour from where we lived and encounter a different language group (this does not include the national language). Last Sunday at Japanese Baptist Church I was talking with a pastor from Burma who is hoping to start a Burmese worship service at JBC. We talked about the two distinct Burmese groups arriving in the Seattle area (Chin and Karen) and how these groups have a different language and culture. There cannot be one service for both as their languages and cultures are so different.

Even in English there are some days when we do not understand each other. The Pickles cartoon in Tuesday’s Seattle Times has this dialogue between grandson and grandfather.

“Are you busy, Grandpa?”

“Yesireebob.”

“Does that mean yes?”

“Darn tootin”

“I think I need an English to grandpa dictionary.”

Misunderstanding/chaos comes to the world as a result of Babel.

Jesus comes to conquer the chaos. He comes with the promise of another who will assist us in conquering the chaos. He promises one who will walk beside us, support and strengthen us in ministry. One who will assist us in our becoming what God has called us to be. One who will be our helper in the midst of chaos to help calm the waves and bring peace and reconciliation to the world.

Now Jesus is not talking about a personal servant to assist us in our needs (misconception of the role of Spirit). This is not the role of the Spirit. The Spirit is one who assists us in the work God has called on us to do. The Spirit is one who nudges/pushes us out into the world to do the work of God. The Spirit is one who helps us to battle chaos and make sense out of the world. This is the promise that is fulfilled at Pentecost.

But, in the midst of his teaching on the Spirit Jesus adds this section (v.13-14) about prayer and that we get what we ask for. We wonder, “How can this be?” Jesus says to “*ask and it will be given*” but we have asked and have not received. We have a drawer full of requests that have not yet been filled. We have stumbled along the way, maybe even fallen – our life is in chaos at best. We wonder what we may be doing wrong. Where is our faith? Where is the end to chaos?

Could this be because we have a mistaken idea of the role of the Spirit in our lives? Or maybe that the answer has come but it was not the answer we wanted and thus we have missed it? The power of Pentecost, for me, is not in the coming of various languages but in the empowering of the Church to be a change agent in the world. It is the moving of those gathered in the safety of the upper room out into the chaos of the world. It is the Spirit forcing them into a situation they would rather not be in. It is the Spirit pushing them out from the security of locked doors into the highways and bi-ways of the world. It is pushing them out of the pew and into the world – into ministry. It is answering their prayers by putting them to work, involving them in the life of the world.

The world is in chaos and we pray, “O Lord, do something.” And what does God do? God pushes us out into the world and says, “You do something about it.” When we can’t pray, the solution to our problem is to pray. Begin by telling God you can’t pray and guess what? You have started praying again. When we ask God to change the world the question comes back, “What are you doing to change my world?” “What are you doing to stop the chaos?” And God sends us out into the midst of chaos!

Pentecost is God’s Spirit moving the Church from behind the walls, from behind the closed doors out into the world God created. Pentecost is God empowering the church to action. It is empowering the world to break down the walls that divide us (languages). It is our bringing together that which has been separated and make it into One. It is the shaking of the very foundations of the world and challenging the cultures and norms that so often drive us apart.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit empower us to be. But we say that our prayers have not been answered. Well, maybe they have but we have not liked the answer or we haven’t recognized it yet. God is asking us to become a part of the world. To do something under the guidance of the Spirit’s power. To trust that the Spirit is leading us to where God is now working in the world. The Spirit is helping us to calm the chaos of the world by pushing us out into the chaos.

Remember the Israelites starting to claim the Promised Land? They are poised to enter into this new land of promise and opportunity at a time when the Jordan is at flood stage. I remember a flood in a town we served in Maine, Bradley. It is located on the Penobscot River and the floods took a house away – we stood there powerless as it was swept down stream. The power of the water was so great it took the house from its foundation. It was nothing to be toyed with. The Israelites stand on the shore watching the water rush by. They see the chaos of the floods and what are they asked to do? The flood only stops when the priests, carrying the ark, step out into the chaos (Joshua 3:15f). Pentecost is God pushing the church out into the chaos with a message that God is love and that God has a solution to the chaos. God has come and lived in our midst. God knows us better than we know ourselves and God has a message of hope and calm for the chaos of the world. The message is one of grace and hope, empowerment and victory but it has to be taken to the world. The world will not come to us (we have thought it would – all we need to do is open our doors) – Pentecost says that is the wrong theology.

Do you need an example? Simply look to Jesus. Since we would not come to God, God came to us. Jesus came in the midst of the chaos of the world. Jesus came to demonstrate God entering the chaos of the world and to demonstrate how the chaos can be defeated (by love). There in the garden he prayed, “*Father, if it be possible let the cup (chaos) pass from me*” (Matthew 26:39). How was his prayer answered? By Jesus going into the chaos, to the cross. The only way the chaos could be defeated was by entering into it. In obedience he entered the chaos that we might understand God’s love and grace. God always answers – often by pushing us out into the chaos – the question is are we listening to the Spirit’s call.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989