

“Scattered Together”
Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21
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In the beginning God created the world.

The heavens and the earth.

The book of Genesis DESCRIBES this creation. It says in chapter one: "the SPIRIT of God moved over the face of the waters." / The SPIRIT. / That spirit gave BIRTH to the world.

The Spirit has been described as WIND: the wind BLEW across the watery world - - and out of the waves of chaos - - came life.

The Spirit has been described as FIRE: out of the darkness over the face of the deep - - God said let there be LIGHT. / And a fire glowed in the darkness.

Centuries later - - when Jesus left the earth - - there was another great act of creation: God created the church. / Individual disciples gathered in community - as followers of Jesus.

The book of ACTS describes this OTHER creation. It says in chapter two: "suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty WIND." The wind filled the place where they were GATHERED.

And there appeared tongues of FIRE.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was present again - - as the church - - like the world - - was born.

The two stories - are TIED together - by the SPIRIT.

There are OTHER ties between the two events as well. / Connections between the creation of the church - - - and the creation of the world. / Connections between

Genesis - - and Acts. / And these OTHER connections are about what happened BETWEEN Genesis and Acts. / The HISTORY of people and God - - FROM the time the earth was created - - UNTIL the church was created.

That history - - is told to us - - by the Bible - - in terms of SCATTERING - -
- - and GATHERING. /

In Genesis - - chapter 11 people are SCATTERED out all over the face of the earth. / The last thing - - God's new bunch of humans tried to do together - - was build a tower. / They had gathered - - and UNITED - - - but they were united around the WRONG thing.

Striving to reach the sky through a monument to their own ambition.

Maybe like the skyscrapers we build today.

Even the Titanic - - comes to mind - - though it's not a TOWER - - it was a monument to human ambition - - which gathered a passenger list of people who - - it could be argued - - were striving after the wrong things - - like wealth.

And in Genesis - - people were FIRST united around the wrong things - -

And then they were SCATTERED - - across the face of the earth.

From that time on - - they spoke - - many different languages.

THEN - - IN the book of ACTS - - people are GATHERED by God. / They were all together in one place -- it says. / And even though they spoke different languages - - they could understand each other.

Gathered to be the church.

Gathered from all those scattered peoples.

BUT - - as they were gathered together -- as the church was born -- the story of scattering and gathering was NOT - COMPLETE.

Instead - - - it was about to begin again.

The book of Acts - - - is the story of the disciples - - - SCATTERING out across the Greek and Roman empire.

Scattered - - to be gathered - - to be scattered.

It tires ME out a little bit - - - all this scattering.

I find myself asking: "Why does God do this to us?"

Why do we keep SCATTERING?

There are a COUPLE of reasons.

Let's look at Genesis first. / In order to explore the Genesis scattering, I would like you to consider a brief story, called, "Does God have a Big Toe?". It goes like this:

“Long ago, all the people lived in one place called "Babel". Every person lived in the same place, and spoke the same language. All of which made life EASY. Getting news was easy. / And you didn't have to learn a new language in high school.”

But, Arinna's QUESTION - - changed all that.

She asked: "Mommy, I have a big toe, and you have a big toe, and Daddy has a big toe - - - So - - Does GOD have a big toe?"

Everything might have been alright - if Arinna's mother had just said, "Arinna, God is NOT a person. God is invisible, and special, and wonderful. God is the creator of the universe. We are all made in the IMAGE of God - - but God is NOT a person - - and that is why God does not have a big toe."

But - - her mother was busy - - and so instead she said, "Go ask your father."

So she did. He was busy too, and said, "Go ask your grandfather"

Her grandfather was in his garden, digging up weeds with his pal Fred, who worked in the king's palace.

Now - her grandfather was a little hard of hearing - - so when she asked her grandfather - - if God had a big toe - - he looked down at the tool in his hand:

"Does God have a big HOE?"

"Well - - I don't KNOW?!"

"I suppose - - if God has a big garden."

"If you got WEEDS you need a hoe . . . "

Grandpa's friend Fred whispered to Arinna that he would ask the king - - the next day at work..

The KING - issued a proclamation:

"The people of Babel will build a tower - - the tower will reach up to the sky - - so that I - - your king - - can stand on top and look at God's foot. / I will then tell you if God does - in fact - have a big toe."

God - - heard the proclamation being read.

God knew that with all these bricks going into the tower - - and everybody working on it - - no one would work in the fields. / Nothing would be left to build houses. / Homes.

God thought about knocking the tower down.

But they would just rebuild it.

There was only one thing to do.

The next day, while building the tower, Fred asked for a brick, and his friend answered, "Mah atah rotzeh?" / He turned to another guy who said, "Arigato"

And he asked a guy with a shovel who said, "Como esta ?"

He looked at a woman with a wheelbarrow, who said, "Gesundheit"

Pretty soon bricks were flying everywhere.

By the end of the day, everyone was leaving town - - and SCATTERING everywhere. / All talking different languages...

Sitting on the cart - - on the way out of town - - Arinna had been quiet for a while. / Then she turned and asked, "Mommy - - I have a belly button, and you have a belly button, and daddy has a belly button - - - does God have a belly button too!?" //

Well - - when you first hear the story of the tower of Babel - - God seems sort of mean. / Scattering people out like that.

But I guess the point is - - - it makes a difference WHAT we gather around.

It's not good enough - - to just all gather together - -

- - around a tower - -

- - or at the mall - -

- - or for an investment co-op - -

- - or to time-share a condo - -

- - or to beat someone up - -

It makes a difference WHAT we gather around.

In the book of Acts - - the church is gathered - - around the Holy Spirit - -

- - and AROUND the WORD - - it says in verse 41 - -

- - and around BAPTISM - - and the breaking of bread and prayers.

Today - - as we gather on this Pentecost - - we gather around the WORD.

We gather as a people of the BAPTISMAL waters - -

We gather as a people who BREAK BREAD - - around this table.

We gather as a people who HAVE BEEN scattered.

A people NOW united.

THIS GATHERING today - - -

-- is why those disciples in Acts --

-- NEWLY gathered as the church --- would SCATTER out again.

The INFANT church -- of Acts -- scattered out --

-- NOT because God was trying to break up their ambition --

-- like in Genesis -- at Babel.

NOW -- they scatter ---- for the PURPOSE of GATHERING -- OTHERS.

To gather us all together -- AROUND this table:

Romans, Cretans, Arabians . . .

Americans, Chinese, Filipinos, Mexicans, Europeans . . .

Together -- a Pentecost people --

-- a people of the Holy Spirit.

The RED cards on the tables in the social hall are a reminder -- to take home.

They can remind us of the Holy Spirit -- and how the Spirit works.

Reminders of the things we hope are at the center of our community of faith.

Amen.