

Sermon Notes: Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2026

Focus: Babble and Spirit

[Lectionary Readings](#)

I have one goal for Pentecost Sunday: to connect Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. This connection is powerful witness to how God brings humanity together then and now.

The curse reverse

Acts does not simply reverse the “curse” of Babel. Babylon dominated Judah and exerted power across the ancient Near East. In Genesis 11, God confused the language of the builders to prevent empire from crushing everything into a unified, oppressive regime. In Acts 2, languages are not erased. People hear one another and they are delighted by understanding. Unity is not built by force or sameness but given as a gift.

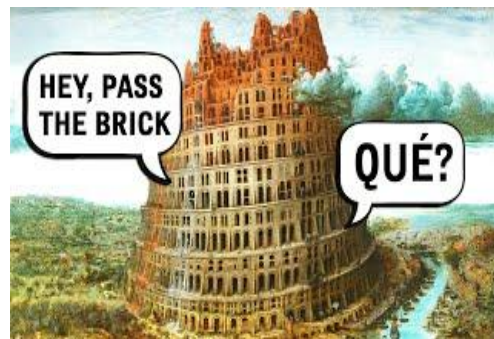
The Tower

The tower of Babel is likely grounded in the memory of actual Babylonian temple structures, especially ziggurats. They symbolized a meeting point between heaven and earth and made a claim about who controlled access to the divine. The biblical story refuses the idea that any empire can build its way up to God or ‘manage’ heaven and earth.

Etemenanki

This name is often linked to the tower of Babel, means “Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth.” It was built and rebuilt over generations. At its height it may have rivaled the pyramids of Giza, and it certainly surpassed them in religious meaning. You can still see remnant of these structures in the ruins of ziggurats, especially of Ur

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggurat_of_Ur



Babylonian Resistance

When the writer imagines the great builders of empire being stopped. It is not hard to hear in it the voice of people who had lived under Babylon’s thumb and wanted that power checked. Genesis 11 critiques the human desire to control unity, and it pushes back against empires that claim to stand at the center of the world.

My Assumption about how the bible came to be One assumption shapes how I read all of this. Much of the Hebrew Bible reached its final form during or after the exile in Babylon. Earlier traditions about figures like Moses and Noah almost certainly circulated long before that.

What we have in Genesis is the result of a long process of gathering, editing, and theological reflection, with significant shaping in exile. The people were asking what it meant to belong to God without land, temple, or political power. It is not surprising that questions of empire, identity, and faithfulness show up.

**Acts of the Apostles:
reverse the Babel curse.**

You all know the story of Acts 2: The Spirit comes, and people begin to speak in languages not their own. What matters is not that everyone sounds the same, but that everyone understands.

If Babel is unity through control, Pentecost is unity through the Holy Spirit. It is often called the birthday of the church, and that is fair. But, more at the center, this meeting of heaven and earth is a moveable feast.

This shared life was fragile and imperfect then, and it certainly fragile and imperfect now. Pentecost integrated fellowship around the Jerusalem Temple and we can pray for that today.

(Pentecost is Greek word referring to a Jewish feast day which I am not going to explore today).

Until that vision is complete, I find myself drawn to a small practice from ancient Mesopotamia. Votive figures were placed in ziggurats to stand in the presence of the gods. They waited. They watched. They represented a person who could not always be there but still hoped to be seen. Everytime I go to Houston I visit the one votive in the Menil Collection in Houston. A small figure, hands folded, eyes wide open. It was set there by a man named Eannatum. Its task was simple. Stay present. Wait for blessing. God bless this mess while I go get my kaunakes (tufted skirt) and bushy eyebrows ready. **Todd**

