

---

## *Pentecost: From Babble to Peace*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Feast of Pentecost**

*"Peace be with you," said Jesus. "Receive the Holy Spirit.  
If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."  
-John 20.21-23*

I was planning on having lots of children crying this morning. That is the usual case during a baptism Sunday. The preacher begins to talk, and the children burst into tears. They are only expressing what all of us feel!

I know that the babies' crying feels like torture to many of us. That crying is most excruciating, however, for the parents. God be with the parents on a baptism Sunday.

All this crying feels like Babel must have felt. Remember Babel, where our ancient ancestors tried to build a tower to heaven? They were over-reaching, striving for something that was not theirs. Their effort was finally thwarted when they were struck with a confusion of tongues. They all began speaking in different languages, and no one understood anyone else.

A confusion of tongues.

I wonder, sometimes, what God actually hears during a typical earthly day. I think God still hears a confusion of tongues. God hears crying and laughter, pleas and thanksgivings. God hears curses and blessings; God hears joy and sorrow. God hears a confusion of tongues and a confusion of emotions.

Consider the various responses to one single event, say, a tornado. Some of the prayers are anguished laments, tears of loss and sorrow. But other prayers are thankful, glad that the tornado did not land here. One event produces different, and faithful, reactions.

The world is a confusing place, even among people of faith. The world is a confusion of tongues and emotions. The world is a Babel, a babble, of reactions and hopes.

These children, about to be baptized, represent that confusion. Especially the children who are crying.

But today, the Feast of Pentecost provides a vision of order in the confusion. At Pentecost, the voices are still varied, like those we just heard reading the gospel in several languages. Sometimes the voices are even conflicted. Sometimes they are even in pain.

But order is provided at Pentecost. Unity emerges at Pentecost. Mission is provided at Pentecost. That order is in the Spirit words of Jesus. When Jesus showed up, after the Resurrection, in the upper room of the disciples, Jesus delivered three things: Peace, forgiveness, and Spirit.

Jesus said, first of all, "Peace be with you." Then he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."

These three realities continue to be the signs of the presence of Jesus: peace, forgiveness, and Spirit. They are the signs of Pentecost, too.

Pentecost is God's answer to Babel. At the tower of Babel, the various tongues caused separation and confusion. At the Feast of Pentecost, the various tongues inspired unity and mission.

Our church, especially during this day and age, is meant to be a Pentecost Church, with many different voices and languages, all proclaiming the gospel together: the gospel of peace, forgiveness, and Spirit.

Babel is the hard noise of any culture, the clatter of ladders trying to climb toward heaven on their own. The ladders crash into each other. Every ladder turns out to be too short. Confusion reigns.

The opposite of Babel is Spirit. Spirit is the soft swishing breath of God, like a mother comforting her children with, "Sh, sh, sh." "Hush little baby, don't you cry."

Every time you hear that "Shhhh" today, think of the Spirit. Think of the Holy Spirit. Think of Jesus showing up unexpectedly. "Peace be with you," he says. "Forgive one another. Receive the Holy Spirit."

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip