

Why?

Sermon on the Sunday of Pentecost

Sermon Text: Genesis 11:1-9



*Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” <sup>8</sup> So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.*

These days, bombs are once again falling in Israel and Gaza. The pattern of war is always the same and has been repeated for hundreds of years. Two nations claim the same land. And

because they can't make an agreement, bombs will fall over and over again and people will have to senselessly die again. Unfortunately, we don't only see this pattern in Israel. The violence that openly appears in Israel is a pattern that is present all over the world. The first 11 chapters of the Bible are specially written that we can correctly recognize this pattern. Because in the first 11 chapters of the Bible, the situation of mankind, as it was in the beginning and has remained to this day, is diagnosed with pinpoint accuracy. We learn this already shortly after the creation account when mankind falls into sin. Because of the fall into sin, direct contact with the Creator is no longer possible. The consequence is that the people mutually hate each other, fight, and eventually kill each other. And all that because the one wants to be better than the other. But people don't only want to be better than others, they even want to be better than God. That's why the people came together - to build a tall tower so that they could reach God. But as we have to recognize every time, the sentence also applies here: Pride leads to a fall. What drove the people was partly piously disguised will and partly volatile pride. The result was the same. The people wanted to storm heaven and be like God. Exactly as Adam and Eve had already tried in the first sin. And like other people try to do again and again to this day. Perhaps the feeling of the people at that time was initially only a desire to be with God. But this desire quickly revealed itself as conceited. For the people wanted not only to be with God but rather to be like God. People today also still have a desire to be with God. That's the truth! The desire is part of our separation from God. However, the people at the time, like many today, didn't realize how they must get out of this situation. Time and again true desire for God is twisted into greed and hate. Therefore, the people commit the same mistakes over and over again. They aim high. They want to achieve great things. Always richer! Always stronger! Always more beautiful! And yet the desire remains. It may be that people actually achieve great things on the way up. And what all hasn't humanity achieved! Truly amazing things. We have dominated nature and we expand our horizon every day. Always further! Always greater! Always higher! We don't want to just conquer this planet, but also the entire universe! Also in medical regards, things are possible that were unthinkable just a few years ago. People achieved great things in this respect. That's good and we are thankful for the many scientists and smart people that God has given us. But what would happen if our Maker scratched away at the surface? Wouldn't some things come to light that would make all our achievements null and void again? We can see something like this at the Tower of Babel. The people at the time also had great plans. But God diagnoses something else. He scratches at the surface and very soon finds there is something very wrong with it. The people were proud. They wanted to be like God. If God had to scratch at the surface of us, very soon something similar would be found. Humanity has been able to achieve great things, but in other ways it has become poorer. Because of the advanced communication technology today, it is possible to send entire libraries to other countries without much effort. Yet precisely in the area of communication, it is clear that people have become weak and vulnerable in their communication. Personal data is stolen from people and misused. Criminals can likewise paralyze an entire country if they only press the right buttons on the computer. Communication has become better through technology but at the same time, people have become isolated and lonely. And all of this despite the internet,

cell phones, and other devices that were meant to prevent this loneliness. Yet it would certainly be wrong to misuse the old story of the Tower of Babel in order to fight against all progress. The stone age was also not an ideal world! Progress is not only a curse but also a blessing. How do we deal with progress? Where are we going? How do we want to proceed? The history after the flood states somewhat resignedly: "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). We must view the story of the Tower of Babel in this context. It is the diagnosis of God and applies the same to the rich as to the poor. It similarly affects the people who have established themselves as petty egomaniacs in the family, such as the megalomaniac dictator. And like in the wars in various parts of our world. This is how it is with us humans. God's Word states this simply and precisely.

It is good that God constantly places a boundary for human beings: to this point and no further! It is good that God comes down from heaven to protect humanity from itself. At that time God did that by preventing the completion of the Tower of Babel. God must also do this time and again. He must sometimes intervene and ruin the evil works of man. Sometimes, He must also destroy the evil works that we think are good, so that we can recognize the truth. Perhaps God must also come to us and do painful things so that we can't get ahead. Perhaps He must restrict us in our pride or other things that we plan so that our plans can finally stop and we can continue with God's plans. But God doesn't just stop with destroying. He doesn't just leave the people alone in their confusion of languages. God didn't just come down from heaven to destroy everything that people built. No, He comes very differently. God comes from heaven and becomes a child in the manger at Bethlehem. God comes from heaven to live in the hearts of people. In Jesus, a fundamental change of direction is shown. The people wanted to come to God through the Tower of Babel. God didn't allow that. But instead, He Himself came to us through Jesus. And because Jesus came, the Holy Spirit lives in and with us today. That's what we want to celebrate at Pentecost! We celebrate the feast where God changes direction. After Pentecost, the way no longer goes from us to God, rather in the other direction! From God to us! And Pentecost is the opposite to Babel in other ways too. At the tower of Babel, the language of the people is confused so that they are stopped in their delusion of being like God. At Pentecost, the languages will be brought together again because now they speak **one** language in faith in Jesus. At Pentecost, God gives the people their languages back so that they also can speak with God again! God gives the people Himself back so that they no longer must search for Him in the clouds but rather can have Him very close! On the one side, there was Babylonian confusion because people wanted to be like God. On the other side, however, there is Pentecost where God brings the people back together from every region and they can again speak one language. That is Pentecost! Pentecost means the end of the confusion of languages. It also means the end of the desire to search for God in heaven. Pentecost brings mankind together with God! Pentecost also brings diverse people together. With Pentecost, God creates heaven on earth because He is among us! This all can even happen in the worst war zones in the world. Where people hate each other, something new can arise. Peace with God! Peace on earth! Peace among men. Come, Holy Spirit! Amen.