

Day of Pentecost C 2016
May 15, 2016 :: Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21
Fr. Jim Cook

“The Re-Discovery of Fire.”

For the most part, everyone wants to leave a legacy.

When I was younger, and wanted to be an architect, I thought my legacy would be the houses and buildings I designed and helped to build; kind of like Frank Lloyd Wright.

That’s sort of what’s going on in our reading from Genesis. Those unnamed people who have settled in the land of Shinar, have decided to build a magnificent city, with an even grander tower (whose top reaches to the heavens), in order to make a name for themselves. In other words, that city, and perhaps especially that tower, would be their legacy.

As a young Christian and a wannabe architect, when I read that passage I thought that sounded like a fine plan. But now I realize that there are two problems with their plan.

I came to understand the first problem some time ago, when I read a sonnet by Percy Bysshe Shelley. And in it, the narrator

describes meeting someone who had recently been traveling to a part of the world where ancient civilizations had once existed. And the traveler describes how, in the middle of a desert, he had come across parts of a very old statue of a once-powerful king named Ozymandias. Though the statue was in pieces, one could still read the words of Ozymandias inscribed on the pedestal:

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

Or, to put it in modern jargon:

“Look around at all the amazing and magnificent things I’ve built, and you will know just how awesome I am!”

But the traveler explains that there was no longer any evidence of Ozymandias’ awesomeness; because as far as the eye could see there was nothing but sand.

In other words, the first problem with the plans made by those guys in our reading from Genesis is that a legacy in bricks and mortar may not stand the test of time.

The second problem with their plan is more simply put: In those days, the effort required to build a magnificent city, with a grand tower reaching to the heavens, would have required the effort of tens of thousands of slaves. And that's a *big* problem.

I'm not sure who said it (though it's been attributed to the Dalai Lama), but it's something worth remembering:

“People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason why the world is in chaos is because things are being loved and people are being used.”

In a nutshell, that is what Jesus was trying to fix. Because not only were certain types of people being objectified in the wider secular culture, but they were also becoming too easily marginalized within the culture of the people of God. And the message of Jesus,

and the Good News of the Gospel, was that *all* people are the beloved children of God.

And that's why what took place on that first Day of Pentecost is so remarkable; and why, in the eyes of the religious authorities of the day, it was also so scandalous: Because the image of God presented to us at Pentecost, is one that is multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. It's an image of God that doesn't quite work for a "politically correct" agenda; nevertheless, it's an image of God which the Gospels insist is true.

And therefore, because of the Day of Pentecost, we can never look at another person in quite the same way. We can never make the same assumptions about people who are different from us, as we once might have. Because the Day of Pentecost reminds us that all people are created in the image of God; that all people can be reflections of the character and nature of God; and especially that all people are the beloved children of God. And the task that Pentecost sets before us, is to learn to see others— to really see them— as God sees them.

I want to close with another quote, but this time I know who said it. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Catholic priest, a theologian, an anthropologist, and a prolific writer, once wrote:

“Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”

On this Day of Pentecost, may we all hope and pray that this world of ours once again catches fire. And may that fire be the legacy that we leave behind.

Amen.