

**“God’s Power”**  
**By Rev. Frances Savill**  
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**Readings:**

**Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21**

I want to begin this morning with the Genesis passage and spend a few minutes on the tower of Babel.

Early on in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there were a lot of people asking “why”.  
Why is Putin doing this?

And at least part of the answer is that Putin wants to build a Russian Empire.

One of his General’s said; “Russia’s future and its future place in the world are at stake.”

In Biblical terms Putin wants to make a name for himself.

Russian leadership wants to make a name for themselves.

But it is not only Russia or Russians.

Many, maybe even most great leaders want to make a name for themselves – American Presidents, Canadian Prime Ministers, Business leaders.

Sports stars and Actors and actresses all want to make a name for themselves.

The people of Babel, want to make a name for themselves, they want to create a city that will rise up to the heavens.

Literally, they want the head of this great structure that they have created to be in the heavenly throne room.

The image of this man-made city, is that it will usurp God, taking the power and place of God. They are going to make a great name and rule.

Think for a moment what happens when one great power conquers the earth – think Hitler’s Germany, or Putin’s plan for Ukraine, or Roman conquest. All are one – there is one law- the conquering law, one ruthless power that makes all conform to the will of the empire.

That’s the kind of picture that is laid out in Genesis 11.

And that is what we see as leaders want to make a name for ***themselves*** throughout our history.

The Biblical alternative, God’s intention for leaders and God’s people, is to let **God** make your name great.

When God called Abraham, God told Abraham that God would make Abraham's name great, that God would make him the father of a great nation.

David sought God's plan, and God gave David the victory.

God made David king.

David wouldn't lift up his hand against God's anointed and take the kingship from Saul, even though he had several opportunities to do that.

David trusted that if he was to be King as God had promised, then God would act in God's time.

Jesus wouldn't make a name for himself.

One of the temptations in the wilderness in the 40 days of testing was for Jesus to rule all the kingdoms of the earth.

All the earth would be given into Jesus' hands.

Jesus just had to seize the opportunity himself and he would have ruled all.

Instead, Jesus followed his Father's path, trusted God's ways, and through the cross, his death and resurrection, Jesus now has the name that is above every name in heaven and on earth.

At Babel, people wanted to make a name for themselves, to seize power on their own terms, doing what was right in their own eyes, and God confused their speech, and they were scattered over the earth.

Then we turn to Acts and we have the disciples, a group of 70 or so people, who God is going to use to continue the mission of Jesus, bringing the kingdom of God to earth.

This group included zealots and fishermen, women and people who were healed by Jesus, tax-collectors and religious leaders, mostly ordinary people; Jews who lived in an occupied territory.

They were instructed to wait and pray. They worshipped together, and they waited, and were ready for God empower and direct them.

And we have this amazing picture of what happened; the Holy Spirit came and flames of fire rested on each one.

Where else do we have fire and the Spirit of God together? Exodus 13

*The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of*

*fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.*

When God led his people out of Egypt, God travelled with the people, the sign of God's presence was the pillar of fire.

*On the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant, and from evening until morning it was over the tabernacle, having the appearance of fire. Num 9:15*

And in the Temple of God, there was a perpetual fire lit, symbolizing God's presence.

God's presence with the people was often symbolized with fire.

So as the tongue of fire is seen with all the believers, it's a sign that each one is a Temple where God dwells.

God is with them.

God equips them and send them out into the streets to preach and proclaim and teach, and continue Jesus' ministry.

God raise up a great name, the name of Jesus and 3000 believers were added to their number that day.

God is a mighty God, the Holy Spirit accomplishes what is impossible.

So, what do we take away from these scriptures?

First, is remember the mighty God we serve and follow. There is nothing impossible for God. There is no name or power greater, and God is very much at work in our world, and in believers.

Second, is that we to continue to trust God and God's ways, and follow God's teachings, even when it doesn't seem like the wise course in our own eyes.

We need to trust the wisdom of God, and the power of God.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the group of believers, and they were on the streets proclaiming the good news, I think that's where a story writer would end it.

*"The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and carried on the work of Jesus, and they all lived happily every after...."*

But of course life isn't that simple, and the history of God's people isn't that simple.

In many ways that is the just the beginning of the story.

What comes next is persecutions, and problems. Inside the early church community they had to choose leaders and make sure all the widows and orphans were cared for – both Jews and Greeks. They had to work out how to be the body of Jesus in the world with very different ideas.

And then the persecutions began.

Things became much more difficult for the early believers, and there was famine in Jerusalem, on top of all the other problems.

One of my many mistakes in ministry has been believing or hoping that when we do God's work as well as we can, things get better and people are happy.

And I think eventually that is somewhat true.

The church did become a place where the community around them said things like; *"look at the love they have for one another."*

Early Christian communities became places of hope and healing, places where people came to experience God and learn and grow.

But we are always in danger of thinking it is about us, that we are in charge of the outcomes, and it is our job to make things happen, to be as God.

Thankfully the Holy Spirit is patient with us in our fear and failings and helps us take on the challenges of being the church.

And the Holy Spirit reminds us that God's power doesn't serve us or our ways, that we are not in charge of outcomes, that we are called to be faithful, not successful or make a name for ourselves.

And the good news is that God has been working with His church from the beginning.

And God is very much at work in us and through us.

**Let us pray,**

God there is nothing impossible for you, you take a handful of fearful disciples and you build your church. And as you pour your Holy Spirit upon your church today we are equipped, empowered, and emboldened to follow where Jesus leads.

God remind us that we are not in charge of outcomes, and often things are difficult as we follow you. So help us fix our eyes on you, on your mission, and give us courage for your work. In Jesus' name. Amen.