

Going on a Wild Goose Chase

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Scripture: Genesis 11:1-9

1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.

² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

³ 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.

⁴ 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; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built.

⁶ And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Acts 2:1-13

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Proclamation of the Word

WHOOSH- the winds were howling that day as the first church gathered, probably about 120 men and women, gathered for worship and fellowship. They were only 7 weeks away from the resurrection of Jesus Christ whom they continued to follow. They met as they had been doing as a small religious minority. It was the festival of First Fruits- Pentecost- a Jewish celebration of the giving of the Law from Yahweh God. In gratitude for God’s gift of the 10 Commandments and the Law of Moses, the people worshiped and brought the first fruits of the harvest to worship God there in Jerusalem.

And then WHOOSH- the Spirit of the living God descended upon them and they were speaking in different languages so that all could hear and understand the gospel.

And the Holy Spirit was unleashed!

Don’t you love God’s sense of timing?

Jews from all over, speaking different languages, have gathered for Pentecost. God has a captive audience and then proceeds to make a splash using ordinary Christians who had gathered to worship.

You never know what God might be up to.

The Church is being expanded and the mission of God is in full motion.

But this isn’t the first time that God used language to do the work of God. As we read in Genesis about the descendents of Noah building a city and the Tower of Babel, language is of importance here, too.

The people want to build a city of bricks along with a tower.

They want to stay put, have one language, and develop a reputation- a name for themselves. But God has something different in mind.

God confuses their language making them unable to finish the task.

Then God scatters them.

The word for *people* in chapter 11 verse 6 is *mortals*.
In fact, the text literally says “the children of Adam” where we read mortals.
Adam means dust, dirt, earth.

The children of the earth take earth in hand and build bricks, but God intervenes.

God limits this human race, these children of Adam, and scatters them, creating different cultures and different languages.

God sets his design for humanity in motion and sets limits on people, reminding them that they cannot be God, they are human.

Yahweh God orders human life to have variety in cultures and languages.

While they want to make a name for themselves, God has other ideas.

God desires that all peoples will know God’s NAME.

And on that first Christian Pentecost, God uses a wonderful variety of languages to birth the church- a church that had not yet been imagined by those first Christians.

This church will proclaim God’s name, and God will fashion a people rather than a people making a god out of what they can build for the sake of their own glory, their reputation.

In Acts the retelling of that Pentecost, “What does this mean?” they ask.

And Peter precedes to tell them that the Hebrew Prophet Joel spoke of this saying I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh- all humanity, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions...your old men dream dreams....Everyone, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The people who wanted to make a name for themselves, will be put to use so that all may know the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, revealed most fully in Jesus Christ.

Do you see the connection?

The confused language of the people of the earth gets put to use at Pentecost to bring the Name of the Lord before everyone!

And the Holy Spirit makes it happen.

Ancient Celtic Christians have a symbol for the Holy Spirit, and it is not the dove descending as we picture it.

You will note that the dove is a part of the Presbyterian seal.

It is here on this pillow that you see, but in the British Isles one is likely to see a goose, yes a GOOSE!

A goose seems odd to me because I can't imagine singing hymns about Holy Spirit, Heavenly Goose.

But what missionaries have always done is to use the symbols and things found in local culture to communicate the gospel in the very real places where people live.

During the 5th and 6th Centuries, Christian missionaries walked, literally, through the hamlets and villages of Britain sharing their faith.

And they followed a Wild Goose!

They called the Holy Spirit- *An Geadh-Glas*- the wild goose.

Did you know this is where the phrase, *going on a Wild Goose chase* comes from????? It began with the Celtic missionary movement.

After my study, I've decided the wild goose for the Holy Spirit is a great image because being, well wild, it cannot be contained, tamed, or domesticated.

The Holy Spirit is on the move, active, alive!

It is the very breath of life and flames which ignite our hearts and minds for God.

It reminds us that faith is a journey as the Vision of Fort Hill church states. It connotes adventure.

And if we have learned anything throughout the ages is that when the church gets too safe, comfortable, and pinned down, the Spirit of the Living God, shakes things up.

Beginning with the building of the tower of babel, and noted throughout church history with movements such as the Protestant Reformation, the Holy Spirit is still recreating us into the image of Jesus Christ- as a living body, not a stale, stagnant building made of earthen bricks and stone.

The Spirit breaks free

and sometimes bites those who get in the way.

And geese aren't cute and cuddly, cooing creatures- they honk and are loud! In fact, they have been used to be an alarm system as David Clark, a pastor in New Zealand writes:

There's an ancient story that it was the loud cackling of a flock of geese that alerted sentries in Rome to an invading army creeping up to the walls in the middle of the night. Throughout Christian history, the clamour of people and movements have expressed the demand for reformation and transformation, seeking to recapture the original Christian vision. Whenever the church has settled into complacent institutional

*somnolence, Spirit-filled people have warned of the dangers of believing that the gospel can be contained and controlled.*¹

The Gospel is not always safe and cannot be caged.

We the church can learn something from wild geese about our life together as we move and live with God.

Even as the Holy Spirit created an expanding Christian Community that day and ever sense, Christians are designed for community.

Faith is not a solo act.

The Holy Spirit calls us together as we travel on life's journey.

Here are five things about the communal nature of geese who travel as a flock.

First- flying in the V formation gives geese a seventy-one per cent increase in flying range, with flapping wings creating an updraft for the bird following. Flying is a co-operative business.

Secondly- the lead goose in the V formation does not, of course, experience this updraft and so tires faster than the others. When the lead-goose tires, it rotates back into the formation and another goose takes over the lead. Leaders take turns.

The third lesson is that when a goose falls out of the formation, it feels the drag and resistance of flying alone and quickly gets back into the formation. It knows it cannot make it alone.

Fourth, when a wild goose is sick or wounded, or shot down, two others follow it to help and protect it until it recovers or dies, while the others continue to fly on. When the goose recovers or dies, a new formation is created, heading in the same direction as the first.

And fifth, when geese are flying in formation, those flying behind honk to encourage those in front to keep up speed. 2

When the church gathers around a common flight pattern, we are stronger for it.

But the truth of the Scriptures today, remind us that flying together allows for a variety of gifts, languages, and differences.

In fact, God intended it that way. Our common vision is one which the Wild Goose creating early on...salvation is meant to be shared as we journey

together as Disciples of Christ who share God's love in our community and around the world.

Those early Celtic missionaries went out into the towns and villages trusting that they were on a wild goose chase...not the kind of wild goose chase that is a futile attempt at nothingness.

Their wild goose chase brought the love of God into the homes, tables, and streets of places where people lived.

They were on an adventure, not alone, but together. And they knew that the Holy Spirit was ahead of them, leading them.

I know adventures do not appeal to some.

Life can bring challenges and pain.

Challenges can be disheartening leaving us hopeless, angry and tired at times.

But the wisdom of the wild goose is that in the community of faith, there are always two which stay behind to minister to those who are hurting.

If even one of us gets lost, we realize that life is better when we are together and they can always get back in formation.

Those in leadership sometimes feel overwhelmed with responsibility of being out front, but the wild geese remind us that we take turns when the one out front gets tired.

And all the while, everyone has a role to play. It is the job of all the geese who are flying with each other to "honk, honk" in encouragement for each other.

We have a mission together. We are the church of Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit to grow as disciples and share God's love. We are doing that now, and we will continue to do so that God's name will be made known in our words and deeds.

So brothers and sisters, are you ready to fly?

Are you ready to chase the Wild Goose, the Holy Spirit of God?

If so, can I get a "HONK, HONK?"

1 David Clark, *THE CELTIC WILD GOOSE IS A GREAT SYMBOL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND FOR ST LUKES*, 31 May 2009 [HTTP://WWW.STLUKES.ORG.NZ/?SID=42258](http://www.stlukes.org.nz/?SID=42258)

2 Adapted from David Clark's article above.