Genesis 11:1-9 –The Tower of Babel

CATCH UP ON THE STORY:

Noah and his descendants have been saved from the flood and have begun to repopulate the earth. Directly after Noah and his family get off the Ark, they are given his command, at least twice, "be fruitful and multiply." It's not a new command. In fact, it’s the same command that God gave Adam and Eve at the beginning of time. If the Flood narrative is a reset/restart on creation, then the command to the new fathers and mothers of humanity is the same: reproduce yourselves, your godly selves so that the world that God has created might be filled with the image of God bearing people, people who look and act like the one who created them.

Noah's descendants have, in one sense, been fruitful and multiplied. They have had lots of offspring and they are beginning to fill the whole earth. But, in another sense, they have not been faithful to the command. Implicit in the command to be fruitful and multiply is the idea they will cover the whole earth, not in a dominant kind of way, but in a diverse kind of way. In our passage, however, Noah's descendants begin to consolidate their power so that they might make a name for themselves.

THE TOWER OF BABEL:

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.

The Tower of Babel
By Pieter Bruegel the Elder
What does this mean for us? It is a call to quit trying to make a name for ourselves. It is a call to not fear that if we haven’t done anything in life, if we haven’t built a monument to ourselves, then we will be left to die in obscurity. It is a call to attend to the command that God has given us from the very beginning, the call to be fruitful and multiply. It is a call to be Holy Spirit filled people who are scattered throughout our world to make a name for Christ. It is the call to evaluate our individual actions to answer this question: Does this make Christ known, or does this make a name for me?

What does this look like for our church? There is always a choice, when thinking and planning for the work of the church. It is the same choice that those at Babel had. We can make a name for ourselves. We can build a monument to ourselves, a legacy to the work that we have done, so that our church might be something. Or, we can be fruitful and multiply. We can work to be image-bearers of Christ, seeking to make a name for him, not for ourselves. This choice needs to be the lens through which we view each and every decision about programming and activities. Does this make a name for us? Or does this make Christ known? Does this feed the hungry? Does this clothe the naked, does this work to take care of the widow, the orphan and the poor? Does this proclaim the Good News in all of its forms, spiritual and physical? Is this motivated by self-giving love, the love that Christ has for us, or is it motivated by self gratification?

This struggle between these two questions is nothing new. It’s been happening since the beginning of time. It is with confidence, however, that we celebrate this day: God is faithful and will help us to be fruitful and multiply!