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A Service of Christian Worship in the Season of Pentecost

STEPHEN C. JOHNSON

The following liturgy was written and led by upper-division university students in a class entitled Christian Worship. This liturgy, written for the season of Pentecost, revolves around the theme of separation and reunion, and moves from the experience of being scattered to being gathered by evoking the Old Testament story of Babel and the Pentecost account of Acts 2. The liturgy begins with an invitation to gather around a globe as a symbol of the scattered people of God and moves, in the end, toward the table of the Lord—that eschatological image of the gathering of all people from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

** Robert Caskey, Sarah Crowe, Caleb Henderson, Jacob Lollar, Sierra Pierce*

WE ARE GATHERED TO WORSHIP

(To be read by multiple voices in unison)

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.”

They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.

Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that they were building.

The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

(To be read by the same multiple voices, but in multiple languages)

So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.

That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Genesis 11.1–9

Leader: As we gather together in this place today, we are reminded that we come from many places—scattered, confused. We speak different languages and do not understand one another. We speak the same language and do not understand each other. We are scattered and confused.

We Confess Together

People: God of Babel. God of Pentecost. God who divides and brings back together again. We come to you now to confess:

Our disunity.

Our selfishness.

Our self-dependence.

We have misunderstood each other:

Used each other.

And scattered ourselves.

Leader: We need your help. We fear and misunderstand each other. We argue over things that seem so meaningful to us, yet are the mere images of our selfishness.

People: We speak evil of each other.

We fight. We go to war.

We destroy ourselves.

We need your Spirit.

Leader: We need you to come now and sweep over us—to change our hearts and unify our souls, to take away our selfishness and pride, to give us understanding.

People: Spirit, we now wait in silence. Hear the cries of our heart and the personal confession of our wrongs.
(Silence)

Leader: Come now, Spirit. Breathe into us and fill our hearts—or else, we are left to destruction.

All: Amen.

Leader: But the time has come when God has ordained that we should not be scattered, but that we should be one people in Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, and ascended to Heaven. Now, we receive the Holy Spirit to enable us to come together as one body in Christ Jesus.

Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord of peace give us peace at all times and in all ways. May the Spirit of God illuminate our hearts and minds as we receive his Word.

We Receive the Word of God

Hymn: “Open My Eyes, That I May See”

Reader: When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven

and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit

and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2.1–4

The Ministry of the Word

We Respond to God's Word

Leader: Thanks be to God who out of his goodness has filled us.
He has taken our iniquity and named us his children.

People: Thanks be to God forever and ever.
He has given us life and purpose.
He has made us a people.

Leader: It is his Spirit who moves among us, unifying and creating oneness.

People: To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
we give thanks forever and ever.

All: Amen.

We Embody God's Word . . . by joining voices in song.

(The following songs, or other appropriate ones, may be sung)

Hymn: "Spirit of the Living God"

Hymn: "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

. . . by sharing a common meal.

Leader: Send your Holy Spirit upon us that we may be fed with the body and blood of your Son and be filled with your life and goodness. Strengthen us to do your work and to be your body in the world. Unite us in Christ and give us your peace.

Through this bread allow us to see our diversity and to embrace it and show us your power in bringing people together. Show us your power in unity. Though this bread is broken into pieces, it unites us. As the bricks of Babel were baked and gave birth to confusion and the scattering of all peoples, the breaking of this bread has brought us back together as one through your holy power.

Through this cup, pour out onto us again at Pentecost your Spirit. Show us our feeble acts in trying to control you, and let us take delight in knowing that you are forming us. As we drink the cup of your Spirit, fill us with your uncontrollable fire and purify us.

(As the bread and cup are shared, these words may be spoken to one another:)

May the body and blood of Jesus purify you and fill you yet more.

We are Sent into the World

Leader: Even as the Spirit of God has come at Pentecost, gathering that which is scattered—

People: Even as the Spirit of God has come among us, gathering that which is scattered—we pray that the Spirit of God may come to all, gathering that which is scattered.

Hymn: "Shine, Jesus Shine"

Leader: Go now, in the love of God, the compassion of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit!

All: Amen.

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