

Mark 2:1-12, Genesis 11:1-9  
“Knocking down our towers”

I'm not sure I've ever been so worried in my life about war than I am this week. When I was in college I was involved in being speaking out strongly against desert storm and then when I was in Florida also before we invaded Iraq I spoke strongly against it. But I feel a bit different about this one. I feel that I know something about Russia, and something about the person who is in charge of Russia and I have seen first hand how he really doesn't care about people, not even his people, but more about making a name for himself. Whenever there is someone trying to make a name for themselves at all costs, well, that is dangerous.

Both of our Scriptures today warn us of the dangers of making a name for ourselves and it is a timely message not only for our world politics, but also for us. Let's see if we can hear it.

**READ**

In order to understand what happened in the story of the tower of Babel and what is happening today around us we have to know what has happened beforehand in Genesis. Since the beginning of Genesis God has commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply. The purpose of this command is not so that we could simply populate the earth. This command which is given to Adam and Eve, and to Noah is so that those people whom God had chosen, those who knew God and loved God would go out and bring the news of God's everlasting covenant to the world. The scattering of the human race was not about population growth, but it was about bringing the Good News to all of humanity.

In chapter 11 of Genesis Noah's descendants seem to forget this. They seem to forget that God has entrusted us with a message that is in reality not meant just for our blessing and to be kept to ourselves so that we can make a name for ourselves, but rather that God's blessing is meant for all people and that all people are able to hear and take part in God's message of love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The tower of Babel is a story about a group of people who think it is better to build a magnificent building so that they could stick together forever and be known all over the land for their magnificent feat. They state Let us make a tower so that we can make a name for ourselves.

But these are not God's plans. We see the same issue taking place in our first Scripture. The transfiguration has been classified by many scholars as the peak before the very deep, long valley. What is the transfiguration? It is the account in Scripture that I just read to you this morning. Jesus goes up on a mountain and takes three disciples. There he becomes transfigured. The word trans means changed and figure means appearance. His appearance literally changes. And every year we celebrate this Sunday the Sunday before the first Sunday of lent. Now the timing is absolutely crucial.

The transfiguration is the high, the hint of Easter to come before the low of lent that is looming in the near future. Let's set the stage. Jesus takes his three favorite disciples: Peter, James and John. They went with him to the raising of Jairus' daughter, he asks them to stay with him as he agonizes in the Garden of Gethsemany. Not only are Peter, James and John his favorite disciples but Peter in a few verses earlier is coming off a major win because he just answered correctly the question of questions that Jesus had just asked the disciples. Jesus had asked "Who do people say that I am", and Peter had answered "The Messiah". Jesus had asked then "Is that your final answer", and Peter had answered my final answer.

Peter was riding high because he had finally gotten it right. Jesus was the Messiah. Mark doesn't tell us why Jesus takes these disciples up the mountain but Luke in his Gospel states that they go up the mountain with Jesus to pray. They start praying when all of a sudden Jesus' clothes become radiant, blinding. Then two of the greatest and most important figures of the Old Testament appear next to Jesus and begin talking with him. Peter, Scripture says, was scared to death, yet probably emboldened by his previous very correct answer blurts out "Rabbi". When Peter is confronted by the glory of God he stumbles, and even more so he makes some very crucial fundamental, embarrassing mistakes. Even his first word, Rabbi, was wrong. He had got it right earlier when he had called Jesus: Messiah. So why does he now revert back to the old way of calling the Lord. Why demote the chosen one of God back to a mere teacher. But his first blunder doesn't stop him from speaking again. If you look at the Scripture again we see him state: "It sure is a good thing we are here," almost as if he states lucky for you Jesus that we tagged along because hey, you're going to need us, as if the Messiah needed anyone.

Strike two but he doesn't stop. Let's build three identical huts he continues, one for each of you so we can keep you all in one place. Strike three: Jesus was the Messiah, the living God. You can't contain him as if he is some Genie in a bottle. This thought comes from wanting to make a name for himself.

Instead of allowing our God to work through us, how often do we want him just to work for us. God had told them to spread his word across the earth by populating the earth, the people were so happy with themselves that they wanted to stay together and not leave each other. Wouldn't it be nice to build a nice city with a tower in it and live happily ever after?

But God had different plans. He mixed up their languages so that they would be forced to separate and leave this self-centered, name seeking, God forsaken project by itself. God's command to spread his message across the earth was not going to be denied.

Brothers and sisters the church is not a place where like minded people come to build themselves up. No, the church is a place where we come to get fed and watered, to hear God's message and then instead of building our own little tower and trying to put ourselves in God's stead and say look how nice and pretty we are, our responsibility is then to go out and spread the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that other people can come to know the joy we have.

But the event known as the transfiguration and our Genesis Scripture recounting the tower of Babel don't serve just to show how we get it wrong: - but also to show that many times there is a high before the low. When we are walking the closest with Christ and things are happening around you, amazing you, it is then when you are the most vulnerable. For when our tower falls, it is a pretty hard fall.

Today we get a glimpse of Easter in the transfiguration, Jesus coming in glory up on the mountain, and yet we realize that lent is just days away and can't help but push itself on us today. In three days we begin our descent down the mountain when we purposefully humble ourselves, bring our towers down.

As we go through life we are blessed periodically with visions of what can and will be. I see that through you as you make things happen here at FPC. Maybe I'm just in a privileged position because I get to see the light on the top of the hill. But I also see

the valleys and I know that the valleys are deep, dry, and discouraging. We need to be able to see the eternal life even when we are in the valley of the shadow of death.

You may be on top of the mountain today: rejoice and give thanks because you are experiencing a taste of what eternal life is. You may be in the valley, walking down the mountain, know that the empty tomb, the risen Christ is coming to meet you and you will be confronted by glory.

Let us put our efforts in this church not to make a name for ourselves but rather for Jesus Christ by going out from this sanctuary convinced and invigorated to make a name for the one who gave us his name and his life. So knock down your towers, whatever they may be in this season of Lent. Amen.