

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
“Pentecost and the First Christian Sermon”

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**When we are united in God’s mission,
our United Mission will grow.**

“Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 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. (Genesis 11:7-9 NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” (Acts 2:1-8 NRSV)

Greetings from your Ambassador for United Mission. The season of Pentecost this year begins on May 23—50 days after Easter. The temptation is to make Pentecost a one-day event, but it is not. In some churches, the season after Pentecost is known as “ordinary time.” This is an unfortunate designation. The season is more about what Walter Brueggemann called “the hovering guidance of the Spirit” than it is about so-called ordinary time. The Book of Acts describes the “event” of Pentecost as one that transposes the way of life of the missional church into **“a surging force that rattles the empire, bewilders the authorities, and turns the world upside down.”**

In the Genesis 11 account of the tower of Babel, God was not impressed with humankind's handiwork. God feared that humans would think that nothing would limit or enclose them. Perhaps the message when God confused their language is not simply a matter of punishment, as we usually think. It can also be viewed as a gift of God: an invitation to slow the feverish pace of life; knowledge that God's love is given, not earned; a reminder to look to God, not ourselves, for the ultimate answers. It can also be seen as a call to our vocation. William Sloane Coffin once wrote, "Our business in life is less to make something ourselves than to find something worth doing and lose ourselves in it." Jeff Paschal wrote about this text: "Warning—This God may turn your life upside down."

We often designate the Day of Pentecost recounted in Acts 2 as the "birthday of the church." There is truth in this, but perhaps not the entire truth. It is also a story about the broadening of the church, as in the hymn we often sing, "In Christ There Is No East or West." God's wind (God's Spirit) was still blowing. The same "wind" that blew in the beginning at creation (Genesis 1:1-2) was blowing in a mighty way on the day of Pentecost. God was still creating. **Then Peter preached the first Christian sermon.** Peter grounded his message on that first *Christian* Pentecost on the resurrection of Jesus and in the Hebrew Scriptures. (The Hebrew Pentecost, *Shavu'ot* (see Leviticus 21), celebrated the receiving of the Torah.)

If the calling of every Christian is to let God turn your life upside down, as I believe it is, then it follows that every Christian should be involved in God's mission on earth in the way in which God leads him or her. And, if **in God's view, there is neither east nor west, neither near nor far**, then I believe that every American Baptist and every American Baptist congregation, as part of our American Baptist family, is called to support United Mission—the way in which we are **united in mission**. I believe that the American Baptist family, with the leading of God's Spirit, can be, in Brueggemann's words, "a surging force that rattles the empire, bewilders the authorities, and turns the world upside down."

- Your church's United Mission giving supports your local region, which makes it possible for the region to provide more effective support for your church and others. In fact, most of the income for each of our regions comes from **gifts to United Mission**. Our giving to UM pays the major parts of the salaries of our region's staff who provide: • staff service for search committees; • assistance resolving church conflicts; • area ministers to maintain contact with individual pastors and with associations and small groups of churches; • camping ministry; • resources to assist your church in growth and spiritual health; and • education and training of pastors, youth, and lay leaders in congregational empowerment. UM giving also supports: • The Office of the General Secretary • American Baptist Men • American Baptist Women's Ministries (through the Love Gift) • ABC Information Services • National Ministries (**now American Baptist Home Mission Societies**) • International Ministries • Colleges, Seminaries, Homes Hospitals, etc. • Career Centers • Mission Resource Development • American Baptist Historical Society • American Baptist Personnel Services • Orientation

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THANK YOU for your support of American Baptist United Mission!

Ron