

Sermon
7 September 2014
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: Genesis 11:1-9

Communion

11 days left to the referendum. And the question on everybody's lips: Who's going to win? The people who think we'll be better together, or the people who want independence? And what's life going to be like after the referendum? Because no matter who wins, I think there will be changes. Last night when I checked the latest poll results on the internet, it said that at the moment 53% of the population wants to vote no, while 47% wants to vote yes. But... there's still 11 days to go – and with numbers this close, anything can happen.

It's as if Scotland is divided, because very nearly half the society wants one thing and the other half wants the opposite. So actually – no matter what the outcome is on the 18th of September – half of Scotland is going to be unhappy. And to me, that is actually quite scary.

Very often on a Sunday we get told that we should make a difference in the world, that we shouldn't only be Christians on a Sunday, but every day. And I think now is a very good time to do exactly that. I think that if all of us Christians stand together, we can show Scotland that no matter what the outcome of the Referendum, we will accept the majority vote

and still love and respect one another. And if all of us do that, it is sure to have a knock-on effect, worldwide. Because the eyes of the world will be on Scotland, that I can assure you.

So we've got an opportunity here – let's seize it!

But we will only be able to do that, if we stand together as Christians. If we speak out of one mouth, *so to speak*.

Today we are celebrating Communion. But what do we do when we are celebrating Communion? We eat bread and we drink wine, to remind us what Jesus did for us when he was on earth. But actually, when we have Communion, we are breaking down a wall.

When we put that bread in our mouth and swallow that sip of wine, we are breaking down a wall – that imaginary wall we build between ourselves and others, the wall that separates us from the people around us, that divides us between an “us” and a “them”, that wall that Jesus broke down completely when those nails were driven into his hands; because Communion reminds us that we are all the same, that we are all one in Christ.

Long long long ago, God told the people to multiply and to fill the earth. But they thought: “*Nah*, why would we do that? Let's build ourselves a huge big tower, a tower that reaches to the heavens – a tower to our own honour and glory. And then stay in one place forever.”

This happened not that long after God sent a huge flood in which only Noah and his family was saved, because the people didn't love and

obey Him anymore... You would think that the people would have learnt their lesson, but no... Only a few generations later and here they were forgetting all about God again... But God quickly put an end to that plan.

They might have thought that they were the best builders in the world and that nothing could stop them, but they misreckoned themselves with God. Because just like *that*, he confused their language so that they couldn't understand each other anymore, and had no choice but to travel the world and find people who could understand them. And thus do what God wanted them to do in the first place.

God soon realised that time and again he would teach his people a lesson, and then in time they would forget about it again. So he decided to send his son to earth to explain and show to them what life really is about.

After Jesus was crucified, risen and taken up to God, God decided to never leave his people alone again, so he sent his Spirit to dwell in them. And on that day their language was confused again, but this time for the opposite reason, to bring everybody back to the family of God. God's Spirit gave his followers the ability to speak in all the languages of the world, to tell every single person alive of the salvation that Jesus brought.

So instead of building tall towers in their own honour, people started breaking down the walls they built between each other. And that's what God expects *us* to do too.

Because we are still very good at building – especially at building walls. Walls that separate us from those people we don't like, those people who look different, who think different, who act different. Because we think that *we* are right, and *they* are wrong.

And although we think that by building these walls we are protecting ourselves, we are actually doing quite the opposite. We are isolating ourselves, sometimes even ignoring the fact that God explicitly said he wants us to go out into the world and tell everybody about his love for us. He doesn't want us to build walls for ourselves, like the people of Babel did – he wants us to all build together on the foundation that Jesus laid, a foundation that stretches far and wide, a foundation that includes every single human being alive, and he wants us to build on that foundation to the glory of God. But we can only do that, once we have broken down the walls around ourselves.

Can you remember the huge impact it had on the whole world when the Berlin wall was broken down? It became a symbol of freedom – a vivid reminder in our recent history about the negative effects of shutting certain people out and keeping others captive.

And like I said before – we should learn from the mistakes made in the past. So let's not build any walls around ourselves, let's not think that we are better than anybody else, better than people who don't come to church, better than people who have a completely different lifestyle than ours, better than people who are going to vote differently from us.

Because God wants us Christians to be a united front. He wants us to include, rather than exclude – for the sake of others, but for our own sake too.

He wants us to not build walls around ourselves, but to build a huge big church, with doors open wide, where everybody is welcome. He wants us to make an effort to invite people in. And in 1 Corinthians 3 we read that He wants us not to build with wood, straw or hay – because when the fire comes, these things won't last. He wants us to build with gold, silver, and costly stones – things that are durable, things that are valuable, things that will last, even in times of trouble.

So let's all go vote on the 18th – for whatever our hearts and minds tell us to vote for – but *then* let's all stand together as Christians, to show the world how even in this day and age, faith can overcome any kind of difficulty. Because inside our church, the church with the foundation that stretches worldwide and where the doors are never shut, there is room for 'yes' voters and 'no' voters alike, because we *all* belong to God. And He will take care of all of us, whether that is in an independent Scotland or in the United Kingdom, because he loves us all.

This he proved when he sent Jesus to earth – so let's once again remind ourselves what it means to belong to God as a unity, when we now share in Holy Communion.

Amen