

## ***Confusion Reigns***

A Meditation for Sunday Morning Worship on WARM Center Sunday  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC  
September 30, 2018  
Text: Genesis 11:1-9

Contrary to what you might think, the title of this meditation is not intended as a reflection on what's been happening this past week in Washington, DC. Although, it certainly could be. But that conversation needs to be left for another time and another setting. Instead, we will be taking just a few moments on this WARM Center Sunday to ponder together the story of the Tower of Babel which we just heard read a few moments ago. Since this is WARM Center Sunday, the time allotted for our joint exploration is necessarily limited but I still think we can spend a few moments getting at the gist of the story and, more specifically, its relevance for us generally in this world we live in each day, as well as specifically for the task before this morning as our worship moves from the sanctuary to the work space of the kitchen and Fellowship Hall.

So, tell me, what do you know of the story of the Tower of Babel? (Hint: Pull out your Bible, if it's not already open!)

- Who is this story supposedly about?
- Where are they?
- What do they decide to do? Why?
- How does God react? Why?

- What happens?
- So, remembering what we've talked about in the past few weeks, do you think this story is an etiology? If yes, what is it trying to explain?
- Okay, so if we accept that the purpose of this story is to explain the different cultures and languages of the world, do you see any sin in this story? (*The sin in this story is the arrogance of humans who believed they deserved to be on the same level as God.*)
- So, if sin is present in the story and addressed by God through the confusion of languages, where is God's grace to be found? In other words, how is God's steadfast love for the humans God created expressed? (*Through the gift of the diversity of languages and cultures.*)

So, now that we have a common understanding of this story, how do you see it connecting with your life today? More specifically, what does this story have to say to us on this WARM Center Sunday where our task is to prepare, deliver and serve the noon meal to people in our community who are hungry, poor, and even homeless?

Here's my thought for you to ponder on this. Most of us have never been so poor as to have wondered how we'd be able to put food on the table or keep a roof over our heads. Sure, there

have been times when we've worried about having enough money to pay all the bills. Sure, we've had to buy hamburger instead of steak, the cheap cheese instead of the good stuff. Sure, maybe at some point we had to pay the mortgage or the rent a few days late as we waited for a paycheck to come in. All this is stressful, very stressful. But it pales in comparison to being evicted because you have no money to pay the rent or the mortgage, or to keep the lights on. It doesn't hold a candle to skipping meals because the cupboards and the fridge are literally bare. It's not the same as having a full blown panic attack because the car won't start and if you don't make it to work on time, you'll be fired and a cascade of tragedies will follow ending with your belongings in a plastic bag on the curb.

We've all had tough times financially. That's just fact. And, because of that personal experience, we think we know what it's like for someone to end up at a shelter like WARM. But we don't. We think we can imagine what it might be like to show up for a free meal or a bag of free groceries, but we don't. Not really. We most likely have no idea what's it like to be someone used to paying their own way who suddenly has to go to a food pantry because there are children to feed and too much month left at the end of the money. We have no idea what it's like to see your Food Stamps allotment cut from \$250 a month to \$15 because of the new restrictions put in place by Washington, DC. And by the way,

this is a true story of a local 74 year old woman. She'd been hoping for an increase of just a few dollars and instead her entire dietary budget just ceased to exist. She literally doesn't know how she will be able to eat and never mind buying needed medications. Unless we've been through this personally, and perhaps some of you have been, we have no clue what it's like to live through this nightmare reality of literally no money and no resources. It's like a whole new culture to be encountered and negotiated. It's like suddenly having to learn a whole new language with no warning and little support.

Dear friends, the language of hunger, of homelessness, of relentless poverty, is one we don't know but we should. We must learn this new and fearsome language because that's the only way we can ever hope to address these chronic issues in permanent ways that lift people up by showing them how to build not a tower to heaven but a bridge to a new life where scrambling for food and shelter is replaced by efforts to build a new life, one brick at a time. Dear friends, no one chooses to be poor. No one chooses to be hungry. No one prefers homelessness to a little place to call one's own. Poverty, homelessness and hunger are not indicative of the sin of the people caught in that culture. They are the result of institutional sin in a society which all too often rewards the already rich and punishes the already poor. This is a different culture, speaking a different language than many of us can

recognize. Yet, it is up to us to transcend these differences, to strive for the life God intends for all God's beloved people, wherever they are, whatever they speak the language of poverty or the language of money. Confusion reigns in our society today over how to address the chronic problems of hunger, homelessness and poverty not because nothing can be done. Confusion reigns because we lack the will to do what can be done. Dealing with these chronic, systemic problems will take time and patience and commitment. There are no quick, easy fixes. But that should come as no surprise because it takes time and effort and hard work to learn a new language, to understand how to function in a culture unfamiliar to us. The first step of our learning this new language begins today as we prepare a meal together to serve to people who would otherwise go hungry. It's not much to do in the grand scale of things, but it's a beginning.

So, now, as we sing our hymn of response I invite you to sing "This Little Light of Mine" as we move into Fellowship Hall. There are multiple work stations and Missions Committee members at each to help you get started with the work to be done. Those of you for whom these tasks will pose a challenge are welcome to join me at one of the round tables for a conversation about the issues of hunger, poverty and homelessness in our community.

Okay, here we go!!!