

## Sermon Pentecost (PP) 2023 Breaking a cherished paradigm (Acts 2, ending with v. 38)

### Introduction

As a Pharisee and a Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus' world revolved around the Jewish people, Jewish laws, and the restoration of Jerusalem. In his talk with Jesus, when Jesus talked about how God loved the world and "whoever" believes on Him, those word uses would have been shocking if not blasphemous to Nicodemus. The "whoever" of John 3:16, 18 and 21 and later in John 3:33 and 36 is a universal word. **(PP)**The good news of the gospel is an invitation to everyone, everywhere." P.12 Paul Borthwick Mission 3:16 IVP This is directly opposite to traditional cherished global paradigms that favor relating only to people from one's own ethnic, cultural, language, status and type.

**But that's not God's heart.** This is why I asked several people to read Acts 2:38 in their home languages – to demonstrate right here in this sanctuary that the Spirit came on the church to turn us all into loving, seeking and serving witnesses to those of other cultures and tongues. We heard the Word in Indonesian \*one of the most populous muslim countries in the world), in Hebrew, the original language for many on that first day of Pentecost, and in Spanish. I couldn't find any Chinese or Japanese or even French or Indian speakers in our area. We will see what the Lord wants to do about that!!! **Let's Pray.**

### Tongues of Fire

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost with tongues of fire. **Why?** because God wants His people to **speak** the words of the gospel with His love and power and authority. It has at least two applications. The actual Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the men and women who were waiting, as Jesus told them, to "be clothed with power from on high, they did speak in languages none of them had even known or used before. That is called "the gift of tongues" in the teaching on spiritual gifts and has become the signature marker of most Pentecostal movement. It is still occurring worldwide today.

I can think of stories from JAARS, Jungle Aviation and Radio service, a branch of Wycliffe Bible Translators that services the tribespeople whom missionaries, translating the Bible into local languages, are servicing globally. In one emergency call to fly out a sick child to a hospital hours from their remote village, the parents and child were afraid to fly in the JAARS twin engine plane sent to them. But this would be the only way to save their daughter's life. The pilot had not yet learned the village's local language and the parents refused to get into the plane and go to the closest hospital. As the pilot approached the anxious parents, he asked God's help to communicate in a way they understood. When he opened his mouth to speak reassuringly to them, he noticed that the parents calmed down and were willing to board the plane. He heard himself speak in a tongue he didn't even know, about the wonders of God in Christ. The Spirit had given him, on the spot, the gift of tongues – specifically the local language of this tribespeople - for that situation and the child's life was saved. The spiritual gift of tongues occurred at Pentecost and is still happening around the world. This is one way God is interpreting His love and mercy to people who have never heard the good news in their language.

But I want to suggest that the tongues of fire which fell on all Christ's disciples that first Day of Pentecost **is more far-reaching than that. It is expanded to cover all the empowering and anointing of Christian witness** when we are surrendered to the Holy Spirit. It is applicable every time obedient Christian disciples have sought, like Jesus, to combine verbal witness with deeds of love and mercy. **The Spirit's great anointing of the church is to live "an invitational life – inviting people across cultures to believe. 100. . . [We move out} "on the promise that "I am with you."**<sup>103</sup> We live sent 121 (Paul Borthwick Mission 3:16, IVP

**(PP)** God has made us inviters to the global "who-ers" who don't yet know about Jesus. We are inviting them to believe in a person, Jesus Christ. John's use of the phrase "believe" is almost always "believe in" or "believe into" because he is not referring to doctrine or a belief system. He is referring to a living relationship with God,

mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ. st! 84 Christian disciples are called to witness to the truths of the gospel found in Jesus Christ

### **The truths about Jesus in the Bible**

Getting a person to that faith commitment usually always involves helping people learn about Jesus in the Bible. Two weeks ago I promised that I would intersperse more stories of how Jesus and angels have appeared to Muslims to lead them to Christ. Here's another true story:

An international student from Istanbul Turkey studying in Boston, was befriended by Christians. Though she was a nominal Muslim, she came to church and enjoyed the community, friendships and food. But when she was invited to a Bible study to examine the life of Jesus she declined. "I don't even know my own book (the Qu'aran) so I shouldn't study the book. (Muslims sometimes refer to the Bible as the book). The Christian friends prayed that she would change her mind. What do you think happened?

A week later her mother called from Istanbul and said, "I had a dream. The angel told me to tell you it is OK to study the book. What does the dream mean? The daughter told her about the invitation to the Bible study. Her mother responded, "You must say yes; the angel said so.". The young woman began a journey that resulted in her eventual decision to follow Jesus. Her mother and her sister eventually followed in faith as well. (Mission 3:15 pp 26-27) That story has 4 major players: the Lord who sent an angel with the dream to tell the Muslim mother that her daughter should read the book, the girl who had the courage and took the risk to read the book, the Bible itself which the Spirit helps people understand, and the Christians who held an investigative Bible study, loved her and prayed for her to find Jesus. God is the great seeking, communicating God and God is always seeking people to respond to Him.

Now, beloved, our church is very monocultural. But Northwest Medical hospital in Porter Indiana is NOT! While I was there this week I had staff from Puerto Rico, from Africa, from Latin America and from Poland caring for me. I loved meeting each one and reaching out to them as valued people.

It may be God has brought some seekers across your path. They may be as scandalous for you to reach out to as Gentiles and the news that God so loved the world - not just the Jews - was to Nicodemus.

**But the Holy Spirit first came on Pentecost to turn the monocultural disciples into cross-cultural disciples and I should know!** I come from a blue-blooded, aristocratic, Bostonian family where everyone who was anyone was Caucasian or a servant! Yet when the Holy Spirit took over my life, He transformed me into a cross-cultural disciple with the passion to gently pursue others with the words: "My God wants you back in relationship with Him.(PP) The Spirit helpss us persevere in witness despite others' initial disinterest because the "love of Christ thrusts us out and the fire of the Holy Spirit empowers us to be like Jesus – seeking and saving the lost!"LK 19:10

These last few months, we have buried several stalwart people who died, believing in Jesus Christ and modeling Christ's life to those in their circle of influence. Therefore, Tony Evan's challenge rang true to me this week. "When soldiers come home from war, the folks who love them are at the airport waiting to greet them. When you go home to be with the Lord, who'll be at the gates waiting for you because you played a part in bringing them to salvation in Christ? They are in heaven because you shared and incarnated the gospel. This delights God's heart and is one way we will hear God's accolade: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest."Mt. 25:21) (Tony Evans, Book of Illustrations, Moody Press, p 341. Several of those who died recently lived sent, invitational lives as the power of the Holy Spirit empowered them with the right words and actions. They are already greatly missed.

**But the opportunities around us remain endless. So I close with another story of how the Spirit give His people tongues of fire today even in most unexpected ways.** A family wrote of their journey with their mother, Alice, who became overtaken by the degenerating power of Alzheimers. Toward the end of her long

journey with that disease, the family watched Alice slip more and more into a world of confusion and unreality. She became unable to carry on or even follow conversations. Although she was still living at home, she was actually living in her own make-believe reality. One fantasy that overtook her was her claim that everything she owned, everything she wore her own Mother had knitted for her. “My mother knit these shoes,” she would say as she held up a pair of shiny rubber boots. “My Mother knit this coat,” as she pulled a parka closely around her. As the disease reached its pinnacle, those were some of the few words she spoke as she lapsed deeper into her own fantasized reality.

But in the final fall season of her life, the family decided to go to a local amusement park. Since Alice was not a wanderer, they brought her a big balloon to hold as she sat on a bench nearby watching their rides. There was a despondent young woman also sitting on the bench, but the family figured mother would not bother this woman so they went off to the closest rides where they could keep track of her. After about an hour the family returned and Alice’s benchmate immediately told them: “Thank you for your Mother. She has saved my life today. She realized that I was sad and gave me her balloon. After I left the park I was going home to end my life. I had lost hope and the will to live. But your Mother told me about the hardships she had had in her life. She told me about how Jesus had been her companion and Savior through it all. She told me of the hope and future God wanted to give her if she trusted in Him. Through her I have realized God’s love for me. I had come here planning to end my own life but now through her words and actions, I have a reason to live again.” She rose, waved goodbye to Alice and left happily holding her balloon.

The Mother’s family were astonished at the woman’s story, yet Alice’s lucidity shut down as her benchmate left, and she barely seemed to register her new friend’s final words. The Holy Spirit gives people (all people who love and trust Him) the ability to witness and lead people to Jesus. He gave Alice a brief period of lucidity and brought back to her all the ways Jesus had been her help. She also received the tongues of fire! Then she lapsed back into her fantasy world: “My mother knit my boots,” she said as she rose and left the park with her family.

Alice died several months later, but her death was preceded by her park bench mate who had been in a fatal car accident. only weeks before. So I believe Alice’s seatmate from the park was waiting at heaven’s gates to welcome Alice when Alice crossed the threshold into heaven!

The Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost to clothe believers with His power. That’s the promise and that’s the reality. We can speak Spirit-led words that bring others to Christ. Tongues of fire, even in Alzheimers! How wonderful that we get to partner with God in bringing others to Him. Hallelujah! Amen.

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