

## DEVOTED TO BEING TOGETHER

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Series: Devoted to...  
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Unity, Multicultural church, Race  
Acts 2: 1-6, 13:1

Last week was Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out in power and gave birth to the church. They did not call it 'church' back then. They just knew God was amongst them through the Holy Spirit. They kept meeting in synagogues. The place of worship for Judaism.

All this happened at the birth of the church and the very early years of the church. But something unique about all of them was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in so much power. Every time the Holy Spirit was poured out in so much power there was a trajectory being set for the church.

And I felt God poured out his spirit last weekend and I know that he did that with the church across the globe. And as I have said repeatedly it's because we are entering a new season and the church needs to take its place in the story of the Kingdom of God.

Not all birthdays are the same. On one of my birthdays, I woke up and I was convinced I was turning 30. It felt different. How I wanted to spend that day just felt different. There was nothing on my body that particularly looked very different from the night before or even the year before. But I felt like something was changing,

Then a friend of mine from the UK wrote me a birthday text and he said happy 28th Birthday. Two things, clearly I never know how old I am but immediately I learnt that I was not yet 30 something changed in me. I wanted to have a party. I wanted to go out. I had a bit more time. For what I don't know. But that is how it felt.

Pentecost last weekend was different. Partly because this easter hit home quite like the first and I believe we are living in a season that will shape and mark our generation. Politically, economically, socially and even spiritually. So the church's birthday last week was a different one. I remember getting off that round and for days in that week, I just carried this heaviness of God's presence in me that I could not escape.

The church is moving into a new season with God. Not just this one, not just the Vineyard but the body of Christ. Will you take your place in the Kingdom of God.

So I think it will be quite important to go back to the story and see what things have always marked the church that even though they may look different in the new season are the same.

Acts 2 is what we read last weekend and I will read some fit again today but before we get there I will go to where Jesus prayed for the church, long before the church existed. This is the story George was talking to us about a few weeks ago telling us that God had always been dreaming for us.

Earlier on when Jesus talked to his disciples about the Holy Spirit he made a prayer for them knowing what was coming for them that God would protect them. And he then prays for everyone who would come to believe, and that would include the church today. His prayer was that we would dwell in unity and be in him as he is in God and promised to be in us.

And as far as the whole church being united, I referred to this prayer saying that I hope you hang on when you realise that even Jesus' prayer has not completely been answered. How we long for when the entire body of Christ will be one.

It seems that for Jesus being one, just as He and the father are one is very important, that is the context in which anointing or the Spirit of God is poured out. And that is what he meant by saying He would be in us and we in Him. He was referring to the Holy Spirit.

Now I will take you to the first big things movement in the church. Where we were last weekend

*When the holy day of Pentecost came 50 days after Passover, they were gathered together in one place. Picture yourself among the disciples:*

*A sound roars from the sky without warning, the roar of a violent wind, and the whole house where you are gathered reverberates with the sound. Then a flame appears, dividing into smaller flames and spreading from one person to the next. All the people present are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in languages they've never spoken, as the Spirit empowers them.*

*Because of the holy festival, devout Jews were staying as pilgrims in Jerusalem from every nation under the sun.*

Acts 2:1- 6

The context of the outpouring is they were together. There is something that happens when believers are together. Both psychically and just in one spirit. God pours out a blessing when believers are together.

Even more than ever I hope that the church will learn to stand together rather than tearing each other down because God commands a blessing when we are together. This does not mean that we will always agree.

Then the spirit is poured out. The power with which the Holy Spirit came down and birthed the church as 3000 people started following Jesus.

My attention will be on a portion of that story that might just escape our attention because it is hard for what it demands of us.

*Because of the festival, devout Jews were staying in Jerusalem as Pilgrims from every nation under the sun.*

Now, what many of us have been alive long enough to know that national boundaries did not look like what they do before and often a nation was defined by language, culture and ethnicity and often that meant race too.

So allow me to read that portion with a bit of freedom and expansion. The context within which the church was born was this,

*“Because of the Holy festival, devout Jews were staying as pilgrims in Jerusalem from every nation, tribe, tongue and race under the sun.”*

The context in which the Spirit of God was poured out so powerfully and the church was born was a very multicultural, multiethnic one. And I think it is the same context in which God will pour out his spirit in a powerful way even to this day. When we move beyond dividing walls. Diving walls of culture, gender, ethnicity and even race.

When this church was planted, we felt that deeply we are being called to be a multicultural church. Across age, race, tribe, gender and all that. Heck, I’m surprised they allowed a young man with dreadlocks to pastor them.

And I have seen deep joys of what that brings. I say often that we have a taste of heaven here. Someone has described that the presence of God here is like being at a conference every single week or every other week. Because I believe there is something unique about how God pours out his spirit when believers are together against dividing walls of culture, gender, ethnicity and even race.

And I have seen deep tensions. In even the decisions we have to make about which songs to do, which language to us. Or when I say a joke that does not translate to one culture or the other. Do we say happy mother’s day when it’s mothers day in the UK or the US or Kenya or India? Or even the natural decision of people about where to sit and who they talk to. I have those tensions break over time too.

And you say, heck maybe it was easier for the early church and guess what it was not easy for them either. Several times there was a conversation about what to do with the people who were not Jews. People from other ethnicities and cultures that had started following Jesus.

The first church council recorded was to deal with the issue of multiculturalism. Other nations, other tribes, other races. They chose the way of unity even while being different.

We would be lying to ourselves if we thought that would not be an issue today.

Yet God pours out his spirit powerfully when believers are together and every nation, every tongue, every tribe and every race is gathered there. And for this reason no matter what the world decides the church must do everything in its power to be together every tongue, tribe, nation and race.

I believe partly its because we all have something very beautiful of God in every culture and people and we bring that to the table. I see that every time this church gathers. I see that every time I travel to other cultures both within Kenya and beyond. Even if one of my friends insists that they have to have potatoes in every meal. What's up with that?

Every five years, this country is plagued by a tribal division that right now is not hidden in conversations about the BBI and the referendum. And we mistakenly think can entirely be fixed by a political process. When the problem is in our hearts and our homes and only God can bring healing if we go to the darkness and the chaos that he is not afraid to go to with us.

The world is going through this big conversation on racism sparked from the murder of George Floyd in the US and it has sparked all manner of reactions in all manner of directions and unfortunate in some places brought division instead of healing.

Yet the church cannot afford to stay silent. And I have personally struggled with this. As I wrote this talk my hands were trembling because what to say?

I am inviting believers all across Kenya that will hear this and across the world too to remember that God has always poured out his spirit when we are together and gathered from every tongue, tribe, nation and race.

Yet to be honest even from the early days of the church that comes with blessing and joy but also tensions that only God can heal. Because the problem is in our hearts and our homes and only God can bring healing if we go to the darkness and the chaos that he is not afraid to go to with us.

And one could say, well we do not have a race problem here or it is not a place or the African church to speak because it is not at home.

But so many times I have gone to the store with my white friends and I have been forced to take off my backpack by black Africans when they were allowed in. Even if they looked shadier than I did which is a lot of my friends haha.

So many times in restaurants they have been given the bill even when I have asked them out to coffee. We have to be honest and agree that the race problem is in our hearts.

Or how many people even some watching now, came to this gathering and just assumed I could not be the lead pastor despite seeing me on stage. And I know some of that has to do with my age and hair. I'm working hard on the age bit.

It was so interesting to hear some people speak highly of the actions of Kenya Police at the beginning of the curfew where they mishandle people saying that is what Kenyans understand but appalled at police brutality especially in the US.

To be honest I am bothered by myself. The fact that I wrote something quite strongly online after the death of George Floyd yet as a community leader I said nothing after 11 people had been killed by our police here in Kenya. Or when Africans were being targeted in china in the wake of Coronavirus. Said something to me about my heart.

And just specifically about race relations globally, I think the African church should speak and loudly while also investigating its own racial biases. The church was always meant to be a voice for the voiceless.

And before you say it is not in the church let me remind you that you have churches that are majorly Luo and others majorly Kikuyu, majorly Kalenjin even in the city. And Kenyans allow me to stop at those 3 as you know we have 43 tribes at least and I cannot list them all and really I wanna speak to the culture power structures. The church should not look like our political parties. This grieves the Holy Spirit.

Travelling I have noticed that the west have predominantly white churches and predominantly black churches. Even Africans would migrate to the west and drift to a mostly African church if not entirely. Where West Africans will find each other, and East Africans will find each other.

Yet, the church was meant to be devoted to being together and gathered from every tongue, tribe, nation and race. That is the context in which God pours out his spirit powerfully and births something new in the church.

But who is responsible for this devotion? Who can make the difference? It takes the voice of those who are seemingly unaffected. The for whom it is far away. Like the church in Africa. Let's not forget that for official apartheid to end people walked in the streets of New York when they could have just gone home and slept okay.

It takes the voice and the welcome of those of us in power. Standing back, giving permission and deciding to live with a bit of discomfort.

As non-Jews were beginning to follow Jesus, Jews had to make the choice to be intentionally welcoming and put up with some of the things that they never dreamt they would. Why? They were devoted, they would do anything it takes to be together, gathered from every tribe, tongue, nation and race.

You see, I want to remind the church that God pours out his spirit in a powerful way when we are together in unity and gathered from every tongue, every tribe every nation and every race.

The last place I want to take you to as I come to a close is this place in the story of the church. The sPirit of God was moving beyond the walls and in a powerful way in a place called Antioch

*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

**Acts 11:25**

But what was the nature of this church in Antioch

*Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called the black, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*

**Acts 13:1**

Again the Spirit of God moved powerfully in a place where believers united together and gathered from every nation, tongue, tribe and race. This is where they were first called Christian.

In this unity, the spirit moved in a way that followers of Judaism felt that this bunch was very different from them. Although they believed in the Old Testament like they did they believed it had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So they started distancing themselves.

Then the non-jews also felt these people were very different because in exception to the converse of Judaism the non-jews worshipped many gods a believed Jesus was the son of God, the image of the invisible God, God incarnate and behaved quite like him. So they distanced themselves from them They called them “little-Christ” as an insult. We get the term Christians from there.

The only thing those 2 groups could agree on about these guys was that they were behaving like Jesus their Christ. And also maybe they saw anointing on them, the Holy Spirit which was a distinct feature of the Christ. So they called them “little -Christ”.

Could we let God deal with our hearts? So much so that our people will call us sell-outs and the others will not understand us the only thing that they two worlds will be able to agree on is that we have Jesus.

When God is done dealing with us far along the way as he deals with us. Luos will not be able to recognise me and Kikuyus and Kalenjins either. I will not fit in as a Cord person or a Jubilee person. You will not fit in as a Democrat or. Republican or a Conservative or a labour person.

When none of the outfits in the word fit us and all they can say is they see Jesus in us and the Holy Spirit on us.

And guess what, this bunch went on to change the world. And we too are being called to change the world in the season that is coming.

So I do not just wanna say thinks that are ambiguous to leave us feeling spiritual but with nothing to do.

In the next few weeks, I have something for you to do. And this is my invitation to you whether you are a believer or not but especially so if you are a believer.

As the conversations of in Kenya of the BBI take steam. What tensions do you feel when you see Ruto, Kenyatta or Raila on screen?

Where are they coming from? Because if you feel a tension within you it is not coming from the screen but from within. Just triggered. Did it trigger defensiveness, anger, pain guilt? Could you invite Jesus there?

In the next few weeks as a global conversation on race happen and the epicentre being the US, what tensions does it trigger in you? Was there any defensiveness, anger, pain, guilt?

God is not afraid to go there with us because he has called us to be devoted to being together in unity. To do whatever it takes to be together every tribe, tongue, nation and race.

Now the reaction I am going for is not, "Great talk man!" Rather one that David had in the psalms.

*"Search me O Lord and know my heart*

*Test me O God and know thoughts*

*Point out anything in me that offends you*

*Lead me along your path of life"*

Let's pray