

Series: "Corona...Corona"

Sermon: "A Pentecostal Invitation"

Text: Genesis 11:1-9; John 14:15-21; Acts 2: 1-13

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- Good morning, good afternoon, good evening whenever it is where ever you are listening to this as we finish another month of living in unexpected circumstances.
- I find it difficult to believe that the month of June is already here. If I hadn't been chased by hundreds of *Euxoa auxiliaris* every time I brushed up against a bush while cutting the grass, I'm not sure I would even believe it was already the month of May.
- For some reason the ladies in our house will watch with "oohs!" and "ahhs!" the beautiful yellow and black butterfly (it may even be a "western tiger swallowtail") moving around our backyard. However, a sinister *Euxoa auxiliaris*—a miller moth getting into the house sounds a loud alarm to "bring out the vacuum cleaner" with the longest attachment possible to capture the evil insect.
- I think my internal calendar this year was most impacted by *not* being able to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus with you on Easter Sunday. That was so different for me, it sort of "put a pin" in my whole Corona virus timeline.
- It also made me mark the passing of time by the events in the Bible *following* the resurrection. Unintentionally, it aligned me more with the traditional church calendar that some more formal churches emphasize.
- I have been on "post-resurrection-time" instead of Outlook or Google calendar time. This included the post resurrection appearances of Jesus for 40 days and then His ascension to return to the Father. This Sunday is the last of those days explicitly counted off or "calendared" in Scripture.
- This Sunday is "*Pentecost*." It is called that because of the Jewish feast of Pentecost that was held 50 days after Passover. You can hear the Greek word "pentekostos," meaning 50<sup>th</sup> as the name.

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- This Jewish feast is also known as the "*Feast of Harvests.*" For this feast the Israelites would celebrate the gift of a newly growing crop from God by offering the "first fruits" of the early harvest of wheat. It was a celebration of receiving life from God's provision.
- God could have picked any day for the last specifically *calendared* post-resurrection event, but keep in mind, God picked this day celebrating a fresh, new harvest of "wheat-LIFE."
- This sermon will take some twists and turns so you will need to keep this in mind for a bit. For now, let's skip back to *clearly* the most logical and obvious place we could go in Scripture on the Day of Pentecost—**Genesis chapter 11.** Do you recall what the first verses of that chapter were about?
- That's right! The "Tower of Babel." Why would it be obvious to go back to the ancient plains of Shinar and its leading city of Babylon to talk about a celebration of a wheat harvest? Good question. I'll try to answer it over the next few minutes.
- You may recall from our studies in Genesis 11:1-9 that Moses used a chiasmic arrangement to record the description of God's *scattering judgment* at the tower of Babel. The *focus* made by that rhetorical aid was the beginning of verse 5. What was that verse about? What did it emphasize? "**God...came...down!**"
- Humans, created to spread the righteous image of God by spreading throughout the earth in faith had decided to trust themselves rather than God. They had decided to live *autonomous* lives. Their choice of autonomy from God was not a slight move toward personal freedom. It was a divorce from God as the only source of LIFE.
- It was not an act of peaceful co-existence, but an act of rebellion It grew and grew just as the image-spreading was meant to grow and fill the earth with righteousness instead of rebellion.

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- It was, as Jim coined it, "***ambitious autonomy***"—actively growing and reproducing rebellion against the Creator.
- Instead of spreading the image of God, humans gathered in one place to oppose God. They gathered and began to build a magnificent tower that they thought would make them like God. The Tower of Babel was in essence, much of humanity giving God the middle finger.
- But, says Moses in 11:5—***God came down!*** The Creator is no "deist-style" God who operates like an absentee landlord never involving Himself in his Creation.
- The Creator God stays interested in his creation and creatures to such a degree that sometimes, he ***comes down*** and gets his feet dirty.
- God had not abandoned the earth to their ambitious autonomy he ***came down*** to do something about it in judgment. I call it a "***scattering judgment.***" Humans had refused their purpose to scatter the image of God throughout the earth so God judged them by scattering them from their autonomous purposes.
- He did it how? By scattering their *language* so they could no longer easily cooperate in their human project of rebellion.
- God engaged—he came down. He clearly and powerfully demonstrated he was ***not*** with these humans in their human project
- So, for now let's keep that thought in mind as well. First, we are keeping in mind that the last calendared event of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Son of God who had come down and engaged humans and their plans—that last event was placed on a day that celebrated the harvest of wheat-life from seed that had been scattered.

- Now secondly, we are also remembering that God came down and scattered the rebellious builders of a tower by confusing their language so that their project—which he was **not** a part of—would fail.
- Can you hold on to those ideas that may not seem related? We are about to look at that last specifically calendared event in the incarnational coming down of God in Jesus and hopefully, that will bring it all together.
- However, first, just to stay honest with some of you, I want to remind you of one more element we have looked at in these past weeks—that is the situation of the disciples following the crucifixion and resurrection—the closest followers of Jesus.
- The night before he was crucified, Jesus was sharing a very close time with his closest followers—some of his dearest friends on earth.
- John, in his Gospel, records many wonderful events and many wonderful words and even prayers of Jesus from that night. He loved these men and he knew they were going through some confusion and feeling some fear that would only get worse. He was “going away.” What did that mean? What would it mean for them and for the mission they thought they were on with Jesus?
- The words I want to remind you of this morning that directly connect with Pentecost are found in **John 14 beginning at verse 15. Let me read through verse 21...**
- ***<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will obey what I command. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see***

***me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."***

- Jesus, concerned for their human feelings, assured his disciple-friends that they would never ever be left alone. They would not face the downside or the upside of what was coming without him.
- How could that be? The Son would ask the Father to send the Spirit. God would come down again to engage humans and the earth in yet another way.
- **God** would come--not simply a power or a force, but a **person** who could be grieved. A mere **force** can't be grieved.
- The Spirit had been there **with** these disciples but, Jesus says, now God the Spirit will be "**in**" you. The relationship, when God comes down this time will be different.
- We were remembering that God came down at the Tower of Babel and scattered rebellious humans in judgment by confusing their language—by breaking their ability to communicate and carry out their plan without him.
- We were also remembering that God placed the last calendared event of the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus on the day of the Feast of Pentecost—a feast celebrating the new life of a wheat harvest.
- And now, let's begin to tie it all together by looking **at Acts chapter 2 beginning at verse 1** and Luke's narrative describing what happened on what we call the "Day of Pentecost."
- Let me set the scene. The disciples have seen, touched, talked with, walked with and eaten with the resurrected Jesus. They know he is

indeed alive—somehow different but maybe even alive like never before.

- In Acts chapter 1, after 40 days, Jesus ascends out of their sight in the clouds going back to the Father. But, before he does this he tells them to WAIT! They are to wait for power that the Holy Spirit will give them. Wait for what? Wait for the right day. What day? The day when they normally celebrate the Feast of Pentecost which acknowledges God for giving life to wheat from scattered seed.
- Of course, this one for whom they are waiting is the same one Jesus promised would come and be *in* them rather than *with* them in order to comfort them when they were confused and afraid.
- BUT, watch what else Jesus says about the coming of the Holy Spirit—God coming down once again. He commissions this whole ragtag fleet of frightened, confused folks—many of them still in need of comfort—to an extension of his mission.
- ***...(Y)ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***
- Did you catch that familiar idea in a little different wording? "Adam and Eve, be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. Noah, be fruitful multiply and fill the earth. Abraham, I will make you fruitful and your offspring will fill the earth. You, 120, go fill the earth. Maybe there is a pattern there that is here again even in the New Testament? ***You think?!***
- So, when Jesus left and the angels told them to quit staring at the clouds, they waited and prayed. They decided there had been 12 original witnesses—the Apostles—and they needed to fill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot.

- They prayed and threw the dice of the day and decided that meant God wanted Matthias who had also witnessed the resurrected Lord.
- And then they waited and they prayed and they waited—around 120 of them who were somehow supposed to fill the world with testimony as witnesses to the Glory of God. Then after praying and waiting comes verse 1 of chapter 2...

***2 <sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***

***<sup>5</sup>Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup>When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. <sup>7</sup>Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup>(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" <sup>12</sup>Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"***

***<sup>13</sup>Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."***

- God came down again. God came down at Babel and confused the language of humans because they were running their own,

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autonomous project filling the earth with sin and death. God came down at Pentecost and "*de-confused*" their language to empower his project of filling the earth with his righteousness and LIFE.

- The "*de-confusing*" for the mission confused some. They thought maybe these guys had just had too much to drink.
- Some asked the question: "***What does this mean?***" Peter explained with a BIBLICAL sermon exegeting the Prophets and the Psalms. This is what God had always promised in his plan of salvation—his plan of redemption-- that he would redeem through King Jesus—that he would save humans from the curse of judgment and he would do it by coming down to his people this way.
- At Pentecost, the reversal of the confusion of tongues at Babel to an understanding of tongues was a sign of this redemptive plan of God powerfully at work.
- If you continue on through the first chapters of Acts you'll come to that spot in Acts 4 that we think of as describing the local life of that first church in Jerusalem.
- Acts 4:32 describes that "***All the believers were one in heart and mind.***" They were unified in purpose and desire. How was this true? They had figured out what Pentecost meant. They had realized what it now meant for the Holy Spirit not just to be with them but to be in them. They had recognized their crazy-big role in God's redemptive plan.
- ***Pentecost was not about the "magic." It was about the "mission."***
- I took you to John 14 on the night before Jesus died so we would remember how afraid and confused these disciples were. Jesus comforted them that night, with the promise of the coming of God the Holy Spirit who would never leave them.

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- That is a beautiful ministry of the presence of God the Holy Spirit. He offers comfort in times of fear and confusion. I do not want to downplay that ministry of the Spirit—Jesus didn't downplay it that night before he died.
- Still, when the day of Pentecost finally comes and the God the Spirit comes down to indwell the church, I don't find that it is mostly about *comforting* us and it is even less about making us *comfortable*.
- God the Spirit came down to continue the redemptive mission to save the world from the sin and death of humans choosing to go their own way. And, He came down to make the church part of it.
- God the Spirit came down upon the church of Jesus to mark it as his conduit of that redemptive plan for this age.
- God came down and confused language at Babel to say I am not with this program. God came down and un-confused language at Pentecost to say I am with this program. We call it the church.
- So, is the church *mainly* designed to be a vehicle of Holy Spirit *comfort* for fearful confused Christians? Is it meant to be something that makes us feel better about ourselves and our circumstances in this world? I'm not suggesting it would never do this but rather asking if this is what it was born to do on that Day of Pentecost?
- Or, is the church meant to be the very tip of the spear of Holy Spirit *power* to redeem the world—to fill the earth with the message of God?
- God waited until that 50<sup>th</sup> day when people would be used to celebrating *new life* from God in their wheat crops to celebrate new LIFE (with all capital letters) from God through the power of the Holy Spirit *in* Jesus' church.
- We say: ***The church does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the world God loves.*** What do we mean by that? Why does FBC

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exist? What does FBC mean to you and to me? These are interesting days in which to ask that question.

- God the Holy Spirit has come down to allow us, his church, to be agents in a mission of redemption for the whole world. He will never leave us nor forsake us while on that mission, but alleviating our all our fears and making us always feel comfortable and un-confused in our lives, seems to me to be a side-effect not the main mission.
- If we believe this, how will we reflect that in our church and its redemptive actions?
- If you get nothing else from this sermon, just consider why God, on a day celebrating new life, unscrambled language he had scrambled millennia before in judgment and why he does this as the foundations for Jesus' church are being laid. Why does the church exist?
- How does this help us see the amazingly great mission of the church—of FBC—far beyond simply providing an enclave of comfort to us in a confusing world?
- My final preparation for this sermon was interrupted by the launch from Cape Canaveral of the first manned USA spaceflight for over a decade. Wow! Things have changed in just 10 years. The inside of the capsule is now sleek and almost "Tesla-like." The sound and the cameras are hi-def and are provided from strategically located cameras and microphones rather than cameras stuck on, almost as an afterthought.
- Elements of the equipment are called strange Millennially-hip names such as an autonomous recovery barge named the "Of Course I still Love You." But, hey, there were no working "autonomous recovery barges" just 10 years ago.

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- From the day my mom read to me about the Soviet Union putting Sputnik into orbit, I wanted to be a spaceman. Then I grew too tall.
- Even though I could never be Colonel Ed McCauley the fictional Man in Space from a late 50's early 60's TV show, I could still sense the power of his fictional mission and the actual mission of National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
- That mission captured my heart.
- When I watched the new launch Saturday, I realized that the greatness of that mission still holds my heart. Times change. Space capsules look different. Names of Equipment get updated. BUT, the BIG mission that captures my heart stays the same and remains powerful.
- God the Holy Spirit came down. Pentecost happened. The church was empowered not for small matters of my comfort in this world.
- God the Holy Spirit came down. Pentecost happened so the church—so that FBC—could and would be part of the redemptive mission of God stretching all the way back to near the beginning of human history.
- As we, FBC, move forward in these next months, lets' continue as we have often been careful to do and **not** begin to make the mission of the church something as small as what we comfortably do together on Sundays. Let's stay as open as we have been to the scope of a mission that happens when "God Himself comes down!"
- If anything, because of what we are invited to be part of by Pentecost, let's open the doors of missional possibilities even wider.
- A few of you will get what I mean when I say, "**Let's not land the rocket ship!**" not even on an autonomous barge named, "Of Course I Still Love You."