

## **Here For Good 2.0**

### **Part 3**

*Acts 2:1-41*

The purpose of Pentecost: To give us the power to live as God's people in order to present his purposes to unchurched people.

**1. They sensed the presence of God.**

*- Ezekiel 36:25-28; Matthew 22:37-39; 1 Corinthians 14:25*

**2. They understood the message.**

*- 1 Corinthians 14:7-9; John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 14:22-25*

**3. They saw the message.**

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### **Part 3: Here for Our Community**

We continue today in our Here For Good series, at the halfway point of our three-year effort to raise money to pay off the debt, moving money from mortgage to ministry, and to raise money to renovate some of the tired, older areas of our facility in order to make them more usable, more accessible, and more effective in caring for our church family and ministering to our community.

So far in this series we have talked about how we need to be here for Christ – that our commitment to Christ and Christ alone will be the only way we can respond to anything that God asks us to do with our lives and resources. Last week, we talked about how we are here for each other. Now that we've paid off our mortgage, we are able to invest money into our ministries to our church family – our children, youth, and adult ministries – to be multi-generational. But we also talked about how we need to renovate and update areas of our building so that we can enjoy these spaces even more.

Our goals for several years have been what we call the four “M’s” – first, that we need to be mortgage free, and we've done that!! We can check that one off the list!

We need to be multi-generational, and that will include better member care. So Mortgage Free, Multi-generational, but we also know that we need to be Multi-ethnic and Multi-site, and we will do that with meaningful evangelism and missional prayer. It's those last two that we want to address today as we talk about how we need to be “Here for our Community.” I mentioned this a couple weeks ago, but I'll say it again. Did Christ die on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin, forgive you, and save you from your sins? (*yes*). Does being saved from your sins mean you will spend eternity in heaven? (*yes*). So, did Christ die just so you could go to heaven? Well, that's where the answer gets a little tricky. Heaven is a *benefit* of eternal life, but if that were the only reason, then why are you still here, Christian? You were saved in order to participate in God's Kingdom work – in this world and the next. So you are still here because you have Kingdom work to do. And in this world, that work involves sharing the Good News of God's love with others so that they can enter in a saving relationship with Jesus, too. In eternity, our Kingdom participation will be different, but on earth, our work is to share the Gospel of God's love. Does anyone disagree with that? I hope not, or else we need to review the Bible. All of it.

So, folks, we are here for Christ and for each other IN ORDER THAT we can best be here for our community, to share God's love with them, that they might come to know Christ, too. And we're going to learn about that from the story of the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. From the very first minute that the church was started, it was sharing the Good News of God's love. That's a pattern the church should always be busy practicing.

Now, I'm not going to go into all the history and background of the Day of Pentecost, as much as I'd love to. But it began as a Jewish holiday that reached its fulfillment as we read about it in the book of Acts, because that is the day that God did what he'd promised to do – save people from their sins so that he could fill people with his own Holy Spirit's presence, empowering them to tell others about Jesus. We're going to read about it in the Book of Acts, chapter two, beginning in verse one. Would you stand with me as I read it to us? Thank you.

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

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?"

...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:1-41, niv)

Thank you – you can be seated.

This is an amazing, incredible, inspiring account of what we can and should be doing to this very day.

Let me summarize what the purpose of Pentecost is...

**The purpose of Pentecost: To give us the power to live as God's people in order to present his purposes to unchurched people.**

Now, for those of us who've been around the Church of the Nazarene awhile, you know that this experience of being filled with God's Spirit is important to us. From this passage, as well as the many, many other stories and promises in Scripture, we know that God still fills people with His Spirit today. But some people think we are filled with the Spirit so that we can live a sinless life of ease in this world.

This passage though shows that the reason God makes us holy is so that we can have the power and the credibility with the unchurched to tell and to show them God's love. It's no coincidence that 3,000 plus people became Christians the very first day God's people were filled with the Holy Spirit. The two go hand in hand. *If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you will work to lead to people to Jesus.* If you don't lead people to Jesus, you might rightfully wonder if you are really filled with the Holy Spirit.

There were some things that happened because of Pentecost that caused those 3,000 people to be saved. Unchurched people should find these same things in our lives and church, starting with...

## 1. They ***sensed*** the presence of God.

When the Holy Spirit is in our lives, people can see a difference in us. Why? Because then we are backing up our words with our actions; we have credibility by our ability to love and serve others. Our words will be backed up by our ability to live out and obey God's Word. That's been God's promise all along. Way back in the Old Testament, God revealed his desire for us through the prophet Ezekiel:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:25-28, niv)

The folks in our community will sense God's presence by the way we live and the way we love, and it's the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to do so. Remember what Jesus said, it's in Matthew 22 – Jesus replied:

"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:37-39, niv)

God fills us with the Holy Spirit so that we can obey the first and second greatest commandment – to love fully – God and others. When we do that, we will automatically obey every other command in the Bible. Then John quotes Jesus in his Gospel, saying:

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."  
(John 13:35, niv)

So when we come together as the church and unbelievers join us, they can sense God's presence. In the account we read, God's presence was so evident in the disciples and their worship that it attracted the attention of unbelievers throughout the entire city – verse six

says, “A crowd came together” (it had to be a big crowd, because out of that crowd over 3,000 people accepted Christ!). More people are won to Christ by sensing God’s presence among his people than by all of our arguments and programs and social media rants combined. Few people, if any, are converted on purely intellectual grounds. People are hungry to experience God – they want to know his presence. You can see it in all the different things people will try, from drugs to thrills to spiritists to rock crystals and on and on.

The Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians:

“As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, “God is truly here among you.”  
(1 Corinthians 14:25, nlt)

They will sense God’s presence among us, especially as we worship. That’s a spirit thing, for sure, but that’s also why we need to raise funds for us to update the worship center to make it as welcoming and effective as possible. We want to do all we can to help them sense God’s presence.

Then the second thing we see in that story about the birth of the church is...

## 2. They ***understood*** the message.

In Acts 2:7, the unbelievers said, “How is it that each of us hears them in our own language?” And then verse 11, “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Let me just state right here: God has always intended his church to be multi-ethnic. Ethnicities are identified by their language, or by their mother tongue. The unchurched people on the day of Pentecost were from 15 different ethnicities, but God made it so that they all could worship together. Ultimately, we see this fulfilled in the book of Revelation chapter seven, as we see the church gathered around God’s throne from “every tribe and nation and tongue...” Folks, God put us on this corner over 60 years ago, knowing that today, in 2021, our community would be multi-ethnic. And if we are here for our community, if we are going to reach them, that means that we must be multi-ethnic as well. And since most of us are white and speak English, we’ve got to learn how to accommodate folks who are brown and speak Spanish, or folks of any other color or language. That means we must be welcoming to them, and worship in ways that allows them to join in with us. This is what we mean when we say we must be multi-ethnic; we must do whatever we can to reach the people around us. It means simple things, like having bilingual signs and print material and bilingual services. We must have opportunities for folks to worship in their own tongues. We are getting there with our Leadership Team – the church board that you elect. Out of the eleven members, two are Latino and three are female. We must also have a pastoral staff that reflects the diversity of our community.

The Apostle Paul was trying to make this very clear. He said:

“Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the

notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. (1 Corinthians 14:7-9, niv)

Every note is distinct and together they make music. Every ethnicity is distinct, and together they make worship; they make the church. We don't want our words or our worship to be empty, just filled with air to the people around us. We need to speak in ways that people will understand! Do you understand *those* words?

Sometimes, those of us who've been around church for a long time begin to develop our own language. We sometimes use hyper-spiritual language (some churches even speak in what they call heavenly languages, which sounds like gibberish to the unchurched person). We talk about being saved or born again, we talk about being sanctified, we talk about theology, we use words like regeneration or sanctification or fellowship or atonement or Scripture or evangelism and it's like a foreign language to an unbeliever. So we must always be aware. Paul talked about this a lot in the Bible. There's another place where he said:

So where does it get you, all this speaking in tongues no one understands? It doesn't help believers, and it only gives unbelievers something to gawk at. Plain truth-speaking, on the other hand, goes straight to the heart of believers and doesn't get in the way of unbelievers. If you come together as a congregation and some unbelieving outsiders walk in on you as you're all praying in tongues, unintelligible to each other and to them, won't they assume you've taken leave of your senses and get out of there as fast as they can? But if some unbelieving outsiders walk in on a service where people are speaking out God's truth, the plain words will bring them up against the truth and probe their hearts. Before you know it, they're going to be on their faces before God, recognizing that God is among you. (1 Corinthians 14:22-25, tmt)

We have to be sure the message is clear, because we want people to have an encounter with God while they are among us. That's why you rarely hear me using the terms I mentioned a minute ago, even though I believe in all of them. And I actually preach about them, I just don't use that language. And if I do, I always define it. If I use the word "sanctify," I will follow that by saying, "which means to be set apart for God's purposes."

So we want our community to be drawn to us by the presence of God, we want them to be able to understand the message, and the best way for this to happen would be like the story in Acts where...

### **3. They saw the message.**

Because of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God among the believers, the unbelievers saw God in their actions. We already mentioned that those who are Spirit filled will love each other, and we talked about that last week in the message about being here for each other. But there is another way that unbelievers will see the message, and that is in the way we love and serve those in our community. We do that in practical ways by

making sure that the areas within our facility are safe and accessible. So we are in desperate need of renovating our foyer restrooms because they aren't even handicap accessible or ADA compliant. But we also need to make our children, youth, and adult gathering spaces more accessible, appealing, and safe as well. Folks, we aren't raising money through Here For Good just to make ourselves more comfortable or to make our spaces more pretty. I hope you understand by now that everything we do is to assist us in accomplishing the mission God has given us.

So we do things to welcome our community into our facility, through things like Homework Club and Trunk or Treat and Breakfast with Santa and Upward Soccer, and making our facility available for outside groups from our community. To keep doing that, we need our facility to be up to date and safe.

We do a great job of serving our community. You gave away hundreds of backpacks and school supplies this summer. This past year you gave away thousands of dollars to families in need that have been hit hard by the pandemic. You are giving away hundreds of dollars for reading books for the kids out at Mountainview Elementary. These are all ways that we show the message. For all our effort, we need to see *more* people come to faith in Christ. So that's what "meaningful evangelism" means – we need to be more effective in helping people come to faith in Christ.

But this isn't the only place in our community where that needs to happen. Right now we have two small groups that meet out toward Mountainview Elementary, a community that is 7-10 miles down the road. They serve that school and the families in that community. That is an unreached area without a church. We need to start worship services out there in their community, so we need the funds not only to renovate this space but to create another worship opportunity out there. That's what we mean by saying that we must be multi-site. We need to be one church, but in more than one location.

Does that make sense? That's exactly what the early church did after being filled with the Holy Spirit. They demonstrated the presence of God in their worship, their language and ability to make the message clear, and by showing it through their love and service to their neighbors – even their enemies.

So is Here For Good important? Absolutely! Because it is a significant way that we can work together to be here for Christ, here for each other, and here for our community. By accomplishing Here For Good, we can demonstrate to our community that we are here to do good and here for good – we don't intend to go anywhere, we will be a presence on this corner until Jesus comes back. Our community has only begun to see the message through us; with Here For Good they can see the message so much more clearly!

I want you to hear from someone in our church who gets it. Her name is Pam Stump. She's been a part of this church for a long time, and has been involved in leading and serving especially among children. Listen to what she says.

*Pray*

*Benediction*

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, niv)