

Series: Why Bother?

Why Bother with the Spirit?

Sermon by Lead Pastor Larry Renoe

Acts 2:11-13, Romans 8:22-23

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, August 18, 2024

Good morning, Waterstone. My name is Sarah Brennan, and I have been attending Waterstone for almost two years now, and I have been asked to share part of my story as we carry on with this series, “Why Bother?” as it pertains to the church. I want to start and end with that question, “Why Bother?” in the months immediately following my abuse and rejection from the church I had been a part of, I started reading a book called, “The Lord is My Courage,” by K.J. Ramsey. This book was such an empathetic companion to me in my healing journey, and one thing in particular the author had said that stood out was, “I will never stop loving the church, so I also won’t stop being honest about the harm that happens in her midst.” At the time I started coming to Waterstone, I was in the fresh, raw stages of healing from abuse and trauma I had suffered at the hands of my previous church. My family had experienced a major crisis, which impacted my marriage, my home, and our position in the church. In the early days of the crisis, it seemed as though the church elders or shepherds of the church were genuine in their intentions to walk with us in our brokenness. However, this changed as I began to speak up about what the Holy Spirit was leading in my life, asking them to consider a different way forward. It suddenly became very evident that a woman had no seat at that table. They not only ignored my intentional and direct communication by refusing to respond to me, but they deliberately excluded me from a meeting with my husband, during which they excommunicated our family. Finally, it escalated to public abuse in the church lobby, with physical force and intimidation, verbal assaults, and later slander, as they controlled the narrative of what happened to me that day. What that did for me was I experienced trauma reactions, which included a huge sense of betrayal, lack of safety or fear for my own safety in my community, and uncontrollable crying and shaking. I also experienced a lifting of the veil and awakening to see just how toxic that particular church’s culture was.

When I began attending Waterstone, I was in this season during which I would decide on a weekly basis whether or not attending church was more harmful or helpful to me that day. Having been raised in the church, and then serving in leadership positions in the church all of my adult life, that kind of weekly decision was a foreign concept for me, but I had recently suffered real abuse from the very place that is supposed to be full of shepherds who bind up the brokenhearted. I am still healing. This sermon series in and of itself brings about tension in my body. When my friends back home asked me, as I started attending Waterstone, they would ask, “How are you liking your new church?” and for a time, the best I could say was, “It is not harmful,” but as I have walked this road, I have chosen to participate and promote healthy church culture. My husband and I have been part of a small group for the last year and a half, where we meet weekly, we share our struggles together, we study the word, and we build each other up. We are determined to shine light into the darkness. I will not stop loving the church, as it is meant to be the hands and feet of Jesus. So here I am, still bothering. Thank you.

I would like to read from our scripture passage today, Acts 2:1-13: “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? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongue.’ 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.’” The word of the Lord.

Larry: First things first, Sarah, thank you so much for your courage to share your story. Yeah. I feel like I need to introduce myself to some of you. My name is Larry Renoe. I was just granted a three-month sabbatical as senior pastor, and I just want to thank you so much for that time. The high point was for Jan and me to be present with my parents, who are in their eighties and going through the hardest days of their lives, my dad having to be put in a residential hospice, late-stage Parkinson’s disease. To be there, to be present to that move was a gift we will never forget, and so thank you for that.

Before I walk into the message today and we share God’s word together, I wanted to share just a poem with you. One of the things that I did during this time was to lean on one of my favorite writers, the farmer poet Wendell Berry, and he has this collection of Sabbath poems that reached into our hearts: “Some Sunday afternoon, it may be, you are sitting under your porch roof, looking down through the trees to the river, watching the rain. The circles made by the raindrops striking, expand, intersect, dissolve, and suddenly, for you are getting on now, and much of your life is memory, the hands of the dead, who have been here with you, rest upon you tenderly as the rain rests shining upon the leaves, and you think then, for the thought will come, of the strangeness of the thought of heaven. For now, you have imagined yourself there, remembering with longing this happiness, this rain. Sometimes here, we are there, and there is no death.”

Well, it is that time of year. Maybe you have seen it. We look forward every year to the Maris College Mindset List. This is a list that describes the mind space of eighteen-year-olds coming in as college freshmen. It is really a tutorial for college professors, to remind them that a lot has changed since they were college freshmen. Now some of them are fun, and they start with the random, like the eighteen-year-old today, and by the way, I am guessing there are some eighteen-year-olds in the room this morning. You can give your feedback on some of this even in the moment if you want, but an eighteen-year-old now entering college has never licked a postage stamp, they have never owned a checkbook, and they have never been alive for a day when someone has not been living in outer space. Then there are some more serious ones. The online music site Pandora launched in 2005, the year many incoming students were born. Now, thanks to the availability of older music on sites like Pandora and Spotify, incoming students are just as likely to be listening to Led Zeppelin as Lana Del Rey or Little Baby on their phones. Dan Rather and Ted Koppel both retired in 2005, effectively ending the reign of network news programs as the primary way Americans get their news. Eighteen years later, the class of 2027 will get their news primarily from social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. We go on. It has been said that Generation Z’s attention span is just 1.3 seconds, but the class of 2027 will engage in long-form content like books, video, and podcasts that break through the noise of social media to capture their attention. For example, last year, young adult fiction sales increased by 31% in the United States, while podcast listens increased by 62%.

Then this, two more: the class of 2027 are interested in contemporary art that integrates video games or gamification to explore ideas of land, indigeneity, the future body, and counter-narratives to the dominant historical record. Hans Ulrich Oberst predicts, “Video games are to the twenty-first century what movies were to the twentieth century and what novels were to the nineteenth century,” and then this last one from the Marist Mindset List. This one gives me the most hope for the college class of 2027. Incoming students often quote the television show, “The Office.” Although the program ended its run in 2013, the characters are omnipresent in today’s college culture, and the show is now a cultural phenomenon, thanks to its rebirth on streaming services. That is hopeful.

What the list says is that every year we are reminded that the only constant is change, right? Well, maybe not the only constant. There is another constant that has been happening for every year an eighteen-year-old has been alive, and actually for every year that you and I have been alive, and do you know what that constant is? That constant is that the most global, most influential movement that the world has ever seen is the church of Jesus Christ. It continues to grow throughout all parts of the world. More on that in a minute, but first I just want to say, welcome to, “Why bother?” This is a series that is especially on Paul Joslin’s heart, but all of us have wrapped around and said, “It is time for Waterstone to enter this preaching series.”

You might remember that two weeks ago Paul gave what I would call a very eloquent confession of how when the church is the church, we are known for dishing up servings of hurt, that we are a messed-up global organization, and Waterstone is a messed-up organization, and we want all of you who have had this experience of being hurt by the church, of encountering spiritual abuse, to know that you are not alone. When Paul preached this message two weeks ago on Sunday morning, there were thirteen people lined up to talk to him after the service. This is real, and it is relevant to where we are, and what we want you to know out of the gate is that you are not alone if you have experienced church hurt, and in fact, God has seen your journey. Ezekiel 34 and 35 tells us that He is angry about the way you have been treated, and if God is angry, we can be assured that He will send help in this life, and there will be accountability in the next life. We want you to know that you are not alone, but it raises a question. It does raise a question. If a church is so dysfunctional, like fickle congregations, and narcissistic leaders, how in the world are we still in business? It is mind-boggling, and we are not only just in business, but again I tell you, flourishing around the world.

Let me just give you a moment of flourish from the Pew Research Center about what is happening in the church globally. World religions continue to grow, which is just rather interesting, because at the end of the twentieth century, almost every leading philosopher and sociologist was saying the church is going to die. It not only continues to live, religion around the globe, but also most religions continue to grow in established places, five or six places around the world, near where they were founded. In contrast to that, Christianity’s growth is explosive globally, around the world, so let’s absorb some of this data.

There are six times more Anglican Christians in Nigeria than in all of the United States. There are more Presbyterians in Ghana than in the United States and Scotland combined. Korea has gone from one percent to forty percent Christian in the last one-hundred years, and here is one. While China continues to be the global center of atheism, sociologists expect that there will be more Christians in China by 2030 than in the United States, and by 2060, China will be a predominantly Christian country. That will change history. As well, by 2030, forty percent of the world’s Christians will live in sub-Saharan Africa. Now you and I know that in many of these places they try to pressure down on the Christian movement, but what

history reveals is when you pressure down on the Christian movement, it only resonates more. It becomes more robust. What accounts for the vibrancy of the church movement?

That idea is what we are after this morning. The church has its issues, but how in the world do we account for its vibrancy? I would like to chase that for a bit with you this morning. Let's begin with one verse that might explain it. It is in Acts, chapter one, verse 8. This is Jesus promising the vibrancy of the church: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In a word, the vibrancy of the church is because the Spirit of God lives in the church. The vibrancy of the church, let me say it this way. What makes the church different than the Elks Club is the Holy Spirit, different than any other human organization or human entity. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the church vibrant, and I would like to talk today about the three ways that the Holy Spirit makes the church vibrant.

The first way is that the presence of the Spirit in the church is the presence of the future, and the second way is that the presence of the Spirit in the church is the presence of the Father, and the last way, the presence of the Spirit in the church is the presence of the nation. So those three things you will be able to navigate as we go through those ways together. Let me just start with a quick word about the Holy Spirit, because I am guessing some of you are exploring this thing called Christianity and the Holy Spirit. What does it mean? First of all, never feel bad for asking that question, because one of the most learned people of Jesus' day, in John chapter three, a Pharisee, like they had the Old Testament memorized, came up, and he asked Jesus, "What about the Holy Spirit?" and Jesus' answer to him was, well, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is coequal and coeternal with me and the Father. He has a person and a person. No, no. Jesus did not say that. Do you remember what Jesus said?

If you want to learn about the Holy Spirit, go sit outside and think about what? The wind, how the invisible becomes visible, how the thing you can't see becomes very felt. Think about this metaphor. The Holy Spirit is wind, and what does wind do? It blows into your life, and then in John 16, when Jesus is teaching his disciples about the Holy Spirit, He says, look, here's what, of a hundred things the Holy Spirit does, here is the main thing He does, in John 16. I won't read the verses. I will let you read them, but what Jesus says is that the Holy Spirit brings my glory to every person who walks with me. In other words, here is the main thing the Holy Spirit does, is He makes Jesus real to us, like the wind. He makes Jesus into experience in relationship. That word, "glory," that the Spirit will bring glory to Jesus, that word, "glory," means weight, importance, vitality, or beauty. The Spirit makes Jesus into the most beautiful, important person in our lives. This God, He is not just on the periphery anymore. He moves us downtown, and to get anywhere in life, you have to go through Jesus. Your money goes through Jesus. Your sexuality goes through Jesus. Your family goes through Jesus. Your work goes through Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus real, such that He becomes the most important relationship in your world. That is what the Holy Spirit does.

When He does that, three things happen that fill gatherings like this, that give the church its vibrancy. So, as we said, the first thing the Holy Spirit does as He becomes real to us is He gives us a presence of the future. It is interesting, and when Sarah read Acts chapter two earlier, you remember that the birth of the church, the Holy Spirit came down on the church and filled up the church on the day of what? Pentecost, now Pentecost was already a Jewish holiday. We would call it Thanksgiving. It was a day before the harvest began, when you would pick some of the first fruits. You would walk down the hedgerows of fruits and vegetables, grab a few things, you would call your friends, have a big party, and say, "Hey, the harvest is going to be really good this year. Let's do a sample."

We know this, right? It is peach time. If you go down to Palisade, you grab one peach, and you get a sense of how sweet the harvest is going to be, or you go to the melon capital of the world, Rocky Ford, Colorado, and you get a cantaloupe, and you break that open, and you can just smell how good the melon world is going to be this year. You see, you get one taste, one glimpse of what the whole harvest is going to be. That is Pentecost. That is Thanksgiving, and the Spirit is called the Spirit of Pentecost.

Paul picks this theme up in Romans 8, and we have these verses in Romans 8, verses 22 and 23: “We know that the whole creation has been growing as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves have been the first fruits,” the Pentecost of the Holy Spirit, “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” What Paul is saying here is that the world, what he is doing here is deep physics, the second law of thermodynamics, that the world is expending more energy, the universe, than it is creating, and it is churning and grinding and groaning, and by the way, you may not be glad to have me back, but by the way, you are too. You all look great, by the way. You all look great, but what I’m saying is, hold on to it while you can, because you can’t keep it, and your life, you may come in this morning. You say, “I feel great. Things are good,” but you can’t keep it. You’re going to lose it. You already are. You have a great family. You can’t keep it. There will be selfishness and bad choices in play at some point, or key members of your family are going to die. You can’t keep it. It’s groaning. All we get in this time is first fruits, tastes glimpses. You can’t keep what you have, but we have the Spirit, who reminds us that nothing here, are you with me? Nothing here in terms of our health or our family is the last word. There is coming from the throne room of heaven, a power that will come at the moment of Christ’s return, and He will make all things new, and everything sad will come untrue, and the universe will be liberated from death and decay. It is coming. This is the first fruits. We get glimpses.

In fact, one of the things I’ve taken to do in in our family, I’m not sure everyone is thrilled about it in our family, but I don’t care. When we gather for a meal, and we have friends and family over, I’ve taken to this prayer from, “Every Moment Holy.” It reminds us of the first fruits: “To joyfully gather is indeed a serious affair, for feasting and all enjoyments gratefully taken are at their heart, acts of war. In celebrating this feast, we declare that evil and death, suffering and loss, sorrow and tears will not have the final word, but the joy of fellowship and the welcome and comfort of friends new and old, and the celebration of these blessings of food and drink and conversation and laughter are the true evidences of things eternal and are the first fruits of that great and glad joy that is to come.” Even a meal is a glimpse of the future, and so the Spirit’s presence in the church makes us people of the future. We know how it ends.

So let me ask you this question. We’ll put it on the screen: How strong is your conviction that God wins, that there’s coming a day when all powers of sin, death and evil will be put down? How much do you lean into that today? I’m telling you that what made the early church vibrant is they had a belief in the end. You see it in the way they prayed. You see it in the way they preached, so much fulfilled prophecy. They believed that God was bringing the future, and even now we are getting glimpses of it. They leaned hard on the future. Do we lean hard? If we do, one of the telltale signs is there is a boldness in us to do things like Guatemala and Royal Family Kids Camp, where we demonstrate the love, justice, and mercy of Jesus Christ, and even more, there’s a boldness in us to tell others about Jesus Christ. It is interesting, after Acts 2, and the Spirit brings the future into the church, the one word that’s repeated again and again that described the early church was that they were bold with sharing their faith. They were not afraid to have conversations about Jesus and history and the end.

One of the books I read on sabbatical is entitled, “The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning.” I recommend it. Let me give you a sampling. This is going to offend some of you. That’s okay, you need to start thinking about this idea: “If your parents are getting old, and you do not know how to bring up the topic of what to do with all your stuff, I would suggest you pay them a visit, sit down, and ask some of the following questions in a gentle way. ‘How many nice things have you thought about what you want to do with it all later on? Do you enjoy having all this stuff? Could life be easier and less tiresome if we got rid of some of this stuff that you have collected over the years? Is there anything we can do together in a slow way, so that there will not be too many things to handle later?’” and then this: “If you are too scared to be a little impolite with your parents, and you do not dare raise the topic or ask them questions to help them think about how they want to handle their things, do not be surprised if you get stuck with it all later on,” and then the best line in the book. Here it is: “A loved one wishes to inherit nice things from you, not all things from you.” The point here is this, when you know how it is going to end, you are willing to have hard conversations with people. That is just about stuff. What are we willing to do in having hard conversations about people’s salvation, knowing how it is going to end? I am telling you, the presence of the Spirit brings the future and makes us bold.

Now one other quick word of application around that idea. I want to take us back always to that word first fruits, that we get now just tastes, real tastes, but tastes, and we get glimpses, true glimpses, but just glimpses. So sometimes we go through life, and what is lethal to faith is we just do not think God is going to do, can enter our life and do anything of substance. That is lethal to the faith. What really happens is that the Spirit is here now, and He is at work, and He brings first fruits. I mean, we had a group go to Guatemala and help people who can’t walk move again. That is the kingdom of God, putting his power and his love on display. We need to set aside small ambitions and say we can really be about God’s love, justice, and mercy in this time and place, but at the same time, it is first fruits. You and I have both encountered people who go around thinking, “Oh, when you walk into Jesus and receive Him into your life, He will take away all your problems,” and these are people who throw around cliches and Bible verses to make you feel better. They seem to forget that it is first fruits, that there has never been a promise that Jesus would come in and make our life totally comfortable and problem-free. If anything, Jesus promises, “In this world you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world.” We are reminded always that it is lethal to not believe God can be at work in any situation, but it’s also lethal to believe that He will fix every situation exactly the way we want it to be fixed. First fruits, we live in this tension of humility and lament and the confidence of the work of God. Tension, but that is where we live.

The second way, if the vibrancy of the church, why bother, it is a vibrant movement. What accounts for that vibrancy is the Spirit brings the presence of the future. The second is that the Spirit brings the presence of the Father. Notice that when the Spirit came down, He brought wind and fire, and it rested upon people. If you have ever read through the Old Testament, you know that those two things, wind and fire, often appeared in the Old Testament as the presence of God came, but what happened in the First Testament is that when the wind and fire came, people were ducking for cover. It was not a good thing. I mean, it was a good thing in that it was God, but in our present condition, to totally encounter God in our condition, his holiness, our unholiness, it is death. It is separation. Moses, who was perhaps the closest person that ever lived in God’s presence, asked God to see his glory, and God relented, but finally said, “I can only let my hinder parts.” I do not know what that means, but “my hinder parts, and I will hold you in the cleft of the rock and cover you. That is the only way you will survive this,” and Moses had a glimpse of the wind and the fire, the presence of God.

Then Jesus came, and Jesus now has taken our sin on Himself, and we are forgiven. He has risen from the dead and given us the promise of eternal life, so that when we choose to believe in Him, we are declared righteous, and we have the fitness to live in his presence. In fact, Acts 2 tells us that when the wind and fire come down, it is not only that we do not have to duck for cover, but it is actually God moving into our lives. We are the temple of God, and the Spirit lives in us.

What does all this mean? It means now we have a close, close relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In fact, Paul describes it this way again in Romans 8, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God, and the Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship, and by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God." The spirit of sonship, we cry, "Abba Father." That word, "Abba," might be familiar to you. If you read the rest of the New Testament, we understand that that is the way Jesus talked to the Father. He prayed, "Abba," which in our language is probably closest to the word, "Dad." It is appropriate, respect for authority, but also close, close intimacy, and what the Spirit does is when He comes, He brings this relationship with the Father such that we know that we have been adopted by Him, and we have close intimacy with Him. We are children of the king. We are the ones who can wake the Father up at three in the morning, even though He is the king, and ask for a glass of water. Why? Because He loves us like a son and a daughter. We have this close, intimate relationship, and we have been longing for that and looking for that for all of our lives.

One of the other things I did on sabbatical was watch a great documentary. Are there any Steve Martin fans in the house this morning? I know that is more of a boomer reference. Sorry. Steve Martin, if you watch the documentary on Apple Plus, he attributes his whole successful career in comedy to the lack of love and respect he received from his father. The whole thing was motivated by that. One of my favorite movies, "The Jerk," by Steve Martin, has the best line in all of cinematic history: "I want to live in a place where the songs are true." Okay, now you are really wondering, "This guy needs more sabbatical." After the movie, and it was a success, they went out to dinner. He invited his parents and some friends. Everyone was talking about, "The Jerk; it was a great movie," and everyone was waiting to hear what the father would say to his own son about the successful movie, and really Steve Martin's successful career. Do you know what the father said? "Well, he's no Charlie Chaplin." Wow, but what happened was Glenn Martin, Steve's dad, on his deathbed had some kind of conversion experience, whether to Jesus or not, no one knows except Jesus, but definitely a conversion to how he had not loved his family well, and he brought everyone in and sat them down. They sat there, and he said, "I just wish I could cry. I wish I could cry," and Steve Martin said, "Why? Why do you wish you could cry?" He said, "Because I know I have hurt you all, and I need to shed your tears." That changed everything for Steve Martin, everything. He wrote a piece in the New Yorker magazine entitled, "The Death of my Father," and this was before we knew anything as viral, but the piece went viral, and everyone was reading it, and Steve Martin in the documentary talks about the greatest compliment he ever received was when a woman wrote to him after reading the article, and she said, "I read the article and wept, and I gave it to my husband. My husband read your article and wept, and the next thing he asked me was this, 'What is our son's phone number? I need to call him.'" When you have the love of a good father in your life, just here on Earth, we know how powerful that relationship is. What does it mean for us to know that we have a relationship with our heavenly Father?

We know two things. First, He wants us to talk to Him all the time. Romans 8:26, we read, I'll let you read it, but it talks about the Holy Spirit making groans, interpreting our life to the Father, because the Father wants to know every detail of our life. In fact, Jesus said, "My father, He's got the hairs on your

head numbered.” One of the ancients said, “If God ceased thinking about you today, He would cease to be God.” He is always thinking about you, always wanting to know what is going on inside and in your world, but what is also true, First John 2:27, is that the Spirit, one of the other things He does is He makes us aware that the Bible is not just a book, but it is also a voice. It is God the Father talking to us, so when we read the scripture, we know our Father’s voice. The Spirit makes Jesus and the Father real to us. We know the Father’s voice.

I spent a lot of time with my father on this sabbatical, and it was a true gift. Many of you know I am a Penn State fan. The person to blame for that is my dad. My dad is an alumnus. For fifty years he had season tickets to Penn State games, and I grew up going to Beaver Stadium, and when you go to Beaver Stadium, Penn State scores a lot of touchdowns. So there, my dad is a very reserved man, and you would very rarely see emotion expressed, but one of the reasons I love to go to a Penn State game is because when Penn State scored, as they often do, my dad would be on his feet, hands in the air, screaming at the top of his lungs, and I loved it. You know what? Even today, if I, Beaver Stadium holds 106,000 people. It is the third largest city in Pennsylvania. When you are around there, and it is screaming, you maybe hear two or three thousand voices. I bet I could hear and pick my dad’s voice out of the thousands. Do you know why? Because I am his son, and I know his voice, and the Holy Spirit says you are his daughter and his son, and you know his voice. So, the Holy Spirit brings the future and makes the movement vibrant, and the Holy Spirit brings the love of the Father and makes the movement full of love.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit is the presence of the nations. We will be quick on this, but did you notice that when Sarah read the text, there were fifteen different nationalities listed? Now you know Jan is here down in front. You should also welcome my wife Jan back, and you Sunday morning people, you should be more grateful that Jan is back than I am. Do you know why? Because after every Saturday night service, Jan, that is her service, she says, “This sermon you just preached can be ten minutes shorter, and here is how.” I am working on it this morning. We could say the same thing to Luke writing Acts. “Luke, you named fifteen nations. You could have just said there were a lot of nations there.” He lists all of them. Why? Because there had not been a listing like that since when? Since the table of nations and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 10 and 11. What happened there? We thought we could run the earth, and the first thing that happens is it separates us, and racial superiority happens, and ethnic division happens, and what is the first thing that happens when the Spirit comes on the church? He puts the nations back together, and there is this beautiful picture. What was the first language that the gospel was preached in the book of Acts? What was the first language? All of them. What was the first culture experience? All of them, and there is this picture of beauty. When a group has the presence of the Spirit in it, what you realize is happening is that people are getting along that in any other environment would probably not want to get along, but the Holy Spirit makes a movement vibrant by demoting our racial superiority and our ethnic identity to second and third place and says, “If you love Jesus, meet me at the cross. Then we are sisters and brothers, no matter what.”

If you have traveled the world and experienced churches in other parts of the world, you have experienced this. I will never forget when Jen and I were youth pastors, we took our youth group from Syracuse, New York to Brazil, and we lived in Brazil for about five weeks. One of the things we did when we first got there was that we had to spend an afternoon with a Brazilian family. So, there’s Jan, I think we had three kids with us, and we speak six words of Portuguese, and the family that we are staying with for the whole afternoon speak six words of English, and so we are just sitting there right after we have used our words. I think the father was just going to get up and say the blessing over the meal, but from

where I was sitting, something really strange happened. He pops up, and he walks down the hall, and I could see him, and he turns into what I knew was the bathroom, because I had used it, and he runs into the bathroom, and I could see a little bit like toilet paper being changed, and so we finished the painful afternoon in Brazil. We got back to the missionary's house, and I asked him, "What was that? I saw him jump up before he prayed. He walks into the bathroom. He changed the toilet paper," and he is, "Oh, you got the MHG treatment." "MHG?" "Yeah, the most honored guest treatment, because most Brazilian toilet paper is like wiping with the Denver Post, but they keep rolls on hand for people whom they really love, and you got it." I am telling you what keeps the movement vibrant is even two-ply toilet paper. When the Holy Spirit is in the house, there is the future, there is the love of the Father, and there is the beauty of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Christ. Do you want to be part of that? Do you want to be born again? It is as simple as saying in this moment to Jesus, "Jesus, I want you, and I want to be part of that. I am yours." Let's do that together as we pray, and then we are going to sing it.

Lord, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank you that He has come into this movement we know as the church, with all its flaws and mistakes and its history of hurting people. Yet there is a vibrancy in this movement despite us, that will not be overcome, and that is the promise of a future that is the presence of a love, and that is the display of a unity that is a gift from you. If there is anyone in the room this morning that wants to be part of this movement, and even more wants to know Jesus and experience this love, I pray that in this quiet moment right now you can say to God, "Jesus, I am yours. I give my life to you. Forgive my sins. I believe you are God's Son. I am yours." All of us pray this together and live this together, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Let's stand. Let's sing our hearts to the Lord.

45:13 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #781