



BelPres Church

The Interpreter

Speaker: Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Great to see all of you here, those of you in the room, those of you joining us online, thank you for being here on this holiday weekend. Glad to have you. I read a story a couple of years ago where a guy working on a translation program typed the song Take Me out to the Ball Game into his computer. And if you don't know the song, it goes, take me out to the ball game Take me out to the crowd Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jacks I don't care if I ever get back Let me root, root, root for the home team. If they don't win, they're called the Mariners. If they don't win, it's a shame for it's 1, 2, 3 strikes, you're out at the old ball game. So he put that into his computer to translate into German and then back again into English, and something got lost in the translation. It said, execute me to the ball play. Execute me with the masses. That doesn't sound good. Buy me certain ground nuts and cracker stack fusigs. I don't even know what that is. I'm not interested. If I never receive back. Let me root, root, root for the main team. If they do not win, it is dishonor. For there are 1, 2, 3 impacts on you at the old ball play. It sounds like an angry Arnold Schwarzenegger, right? Like something got lost. But I think it's a good metaphor for where we are as a culture right now. We're talking, but we're not understanding each other. We're not making sense to each other, and there's a lot of division. We need a translator to help us understand each other. And we're doing a sermon series on what happens when a lot of churches and people give the Holy Spirit free rein in their lives. And that's called revival. And some of those revivals in history have lasted for years and have changed things for the better. And one of the things that happens in these historical revivals is that the Holy Spirit acts like a translator to help

people understand each other and bring them together in unity. Now, you may hear that word unity and think, ugh, that sounds like a lot of work to do that. And yeah, it is true. It can be challenging to relate to people who are a different generation or a different race or from a different culture or who speak a different language or who vote differently than we do. But if we invite the Holy Spirit to help us, it's different than us just trying to create that kind of unity through our own effort. Because when the Holy Spirit is creating the unity. What happens is we start to experience Jesus who becomes bigger and bigger. And so our divisions, political, racial, generational, cultural divisions, start to look small compared to Jesus. And those divisions don't matter as much. And those divisions, by the way, are taught to us, right? Like I heard someone recently say, we're not born with all these divisions, we have to learn them. He said, I have a two year old son. You know what he hates? Naps. End of list. Holy Spirit created unity doesn't happen instantly, but over time heals our anger and heals our divisions. We do not have to be this angry, we do not have to be this afraid. We do not have to be this divided. And when the Holy Spirit brings the unity, it restores us to the kind of community God designed us for and that we longed for before sin messed us up. And that just brings joy. So we see this on the very first day that the church started 2000 years ago at Pentecost, which we celebrate today. And Pentecost was originally not a Christian thing. Originally it was a Jewish religious festival to give thanks for the harvest every year. And God chose that day to send the Holy Spirit, which is God's Spirit living inside of us, to this first group of Jesus followers. And that was the beginning of the church. And it happened 50 days after Jesus was raised from the dead. Which is weird because in any campaign, whether it's a marketing campaign or a football game, momentum is key, right? And there can be no bigger momentum than someone being raised from the dead. So why didn't God just seize the momentum as at the resurrection and start his church? Then why did he wait 50 days? Why? Well, if you have a Bible, turn to Acts chapter two and we'll find out. Or you can follow along on the screens. There's some Bibles around the room. Always when you come here, you can grab one of them on your way in. And the Book of Acts is the story of how the early church spread throughout the Roman Empire. And in Acts 2, all the disciples are gathered in one place where praying and the Holy Spirit comes. So Acts chapter two. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind. Violent is an interesting word choice. The Holy Spirit is not tame and will not be

tamed. Violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. Where they were sitting, they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire, 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. And they were there because of the Pentecost holiday. They were gathered there to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because they each heard their own language being struck. So they all have these different languages, but the Holy Spirit is translating for them so they understand. I know a pastor who once baptized a woman and she came up out of the water speaking perfect Dutch. Never studied Dutch a day in her life, but came up out of the water speaking perfect Dutch. There were Dutch people there who understood what she was saying. Now, some of you may be Dutch, right? And the Dutch are known for having a lot of national pride. There's a saying, if you ain't Dutch, you ain't much, right? So for those of you who are Dutch, you're thinking right now, well, of course she started speaking Dutch when she was baptized. It's the holiest language there is. But for the rest of us, that's a miracle. And that's what the Holy Spirit does here. Verse 7. Utterly amazed, they asked, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 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. So here's a map of where all these people come from. Europe, Africa, Asia. Different cultures, different races, different languages. And this crowd becomes the first church. Verse 12. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, what does this mean? Some, however, made fun of them and said they've had too much wine. Then Peter stood up with the 11, 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. These people aren't drunk as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. Well, you know, it's five o' clock somewhere. Now, they weren't drunk. The point is, they were so filled with joy, people thought something had gotten into them. And they were right. It was the Holy Spirit uniting this very diverse community and making them one community. And that just brings a lot of joy. Verse 16. No, this is what was

spoken by the prophet Joel. In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on some super special people that I choose, on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. So what is the first thing the Holy Spirit does to start the church? Is the first thing the Holy Spirit does to start the church? Give them a bunch of deep insight into the Bible? I mean, that comes but later. That's not what happens here. Does the Holy Spirit give them a game plan, a strategic plan of how to spread the gospel around the world? Nope. The first thing the Holy Spirit does is create unity between people that are very, very different. Creates generational unity. Spirit is poured out on young and old alike. Creates racial and ethnic unity. The people who formed this first church are from Asia, Europe, Europe, Africa, black, white, brown, Asian. See, multiracial, multicultural, multi generational community is so important to God. He delays the start of the church for 50 days to start it on Pentecost, when multiple races and generations would be there for the festival to form that first church. Multicultural, multi, generational, multiracial community is so important to God. He waits 50 days to start the church. And then the Spirit creates linguistic unity. And by that, I don't mean just the language part, because they didn't just understand the words, they understood each other. It's not the miracle of tongues, it's the miracle of ears. So question. Do you think people in our country right now are understanding people who are a different age or race or culture or people who vote differently? Rhetorical question. The answer is obviously no. I think sometimes we literally don't even hear the words people are saying. About a year and a half ago, several of us, including Pastor Rich, recorded a video conversation about immigration and refugees. And the Sunday after we released that video, a person told me they were very angry with me, very upset with me, because they said I only cited biblical texts that talked about caring for immigrants. And I didn't say anything about the need for secure borders. And. And I said no. I said, we need secure borders. And I read a passage of Scripture about that, and this person said, I watched it twice. You did not say that. And I said, well, I did. To this person's credit. They went home, they watched it a third time and sent me an email. And they said, oh, my gosh, you did read a passage about the need for secure borders. How on earth did I miss that? How Did I not hear that watching it twice? And I said, you know what? We're all doing this, including me and all the brain. Research shows that when we get in

these discussions, our frontal cortex, where all our higher reasoning happens, just shuts down. We're in what they call our lizard brain, and we literally don't even hear the words people are speaking. We don't even hear the words. But in this text, the Holy Spirit helps people understand each other. And it's the Holy Spirit that does it. And that's super important, because we can't do this kind of unity through our own efforts. We're incompetent at it. Holy Spirit unity is not natural. It's supernatural. One of the most amazing things about the Azusa street revival between 1905 and 1920 was racial justice and reconciliation. Black, white, Latino, and Asian people worshiped, prayed, and ate together. And in segregated Jim Crow America, that was unheard of at the time. Not only that, they shared power. The elder boards of churches had black, white, Latino, Asian, and women at a time when women couldn't even vote, all making decisions together. They spoke out against segregation because there can be no real unity without justice. Because if someone in our we're united with is experiencing injustice, we stand up for them. We speak out for them because we love them. And this is important. They all voted differently. It wasn't their politics that was holding them together. The spirit was moving so powerfully, it created a supernatural unity. Now, of course, there were challenges. Of course there were times it wasn't easy. And yes, it took some time. But the Holy Spirit helped them overcome their differences in really beautiful ways. In verse 11 of this text, the people ask, how is it that we hear all these people speaking different languages, declaring the wonders of God in our own language? So what were they talking about that brought them together? They weren't talking politics. They weren't talking about the Roman chariot races. No, they were declaring the wonders of the God who comes to us in the person of Jesus. And when all eyes are on Jesus, he gets bigger until our differences start to look small. We had our first One roof gathering here on Friday of all of our worshiping communities. New Hope, East African community, Chinese, Covenant community, modern worship, sanctuary worship. Old, young, black, white, brown, Asian, Republicans, Democrats, speaking Mandarin, Korean, Kinyawandan, Portuguese, Spanish, German, English. And yes, that has its challenges. And the Holy Spirit is going to help us overcome those challenges. But it was also beautiful and inspiring because the one thing we had in common that mattered more than anything else is Jesus and you could feel that in the room and man the next one we have, I encourage you to go. We're going to try to have it outside. So instead of one roof, it'll be no roof and we can have more people because it was

amazing. It's what I experience when I'm in churches all over the world. I don't understand what is being said in the service, but I feel connected to the people there because Jesus holds us together. And very often the only word that I can pick out in what's being said is Jesus, Jesus, Jesu. Here in the US People are looking for churches where everyone is just like them. If you want to grow a church, make it all the same kind of person. That's just, everyone knows that that's what people are looking for. Same race, same age, same socioeconomic status, same politics. People really want to go to churches where everyone votes like they do. If that's your criteria, what's your God? If that's your criteria, what is your real God? It's politics, it's not Jesus. And it makes me sad because it robs us of the experience of Jesus becoming bigger than all of our differences, which makes us less angry and less div over all of those differences. And as you know, in heaven, there's not going to be a section over here for African people and Asian people and, you know, European people. There's not going to be a section over here for conservatives and over here for liberal. No, no, we're all going to be thrown together. The Bible says it's every tribe, tongue and nation. Democrats and Republicans will be together for heaven's sake. Literally. So if we can't deal with that here, heaven is going to be very uncomfortable for some of us. So maybe we need to practice now. So for action step this week, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand someone. You don't understand someone who votes differently or a different race or a different generation. Where do you find yourself thinking those people, those white people, those black people, those immigrants, those native born, those Republicans, those Democrats. I didn't say agree with them. I said ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand them. What are their concerns? What are their hopes? What are their fears? Because when we start asking those kinds of questions, what we discover is we actually all want the same security, community, opportunity. Have a conversation with someone if you know them, and just ask questions to understand or learn about their point of view by reading or research or through movies or whatever. But make sure you ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand them. Because this kind of unity is not natural. It's supernatural. When I did college ministry at Stanford, I loved a lot of it. But one of the things I just didn't like at all was the ski retreat we did every year at Lake Tahoe. And the high school group in that church also did an annual ski trip to the same place. And for their ski trip, there was always two feet of fresh powder on the slopes. But for my college retreat, every time it rained, and it rained really hard, so we'd

have several hundred college students in cabins with almost nothing to do. Like, I dreaded it. All year long, I dreaded it. In fact, when things are hard here, sometimes Christina will say to me, just think, at least you never have to do the college ski trip again. There art thou happy, quoting Shakespeare. Because that's what we speak, Shakespeare to one another. You wouldn't understand it. So I got sick of that. So one year, I booked a really dynamic speaker so that when it rained, at least the students would get something out of the trip because they'd hear from this dynamic speaker. Well, a day before the ski trip, the fancy speaker got sick and had to cancel. And as usual, the weather report called for rain. So I got my staff together and prayed some kind of help us, Jesus, Amen kind of prayer. And we started brainstorming ideas, and we were writing them down, and we're just getting in the zone when this Internet, this pesky intern decided to get all spiritual on me and said, why don't we really pray about this? And I might have said, we don't have time for that. Maybe. I hope not. But, you know, they were all looking at me with their intern eyes, you know, lead us, oh spiritual giant that you are. So we prayed for about 45 minutes. And then afterwards, the same intern said, we don't need any kind of program. What if we just read scripture, worshiped and prayed every night and see what the Holy Spirit will do? And I was like, I'm Presbyterian. I need a plan. You know, like, in case the Holy Spirit doesn't do his job, I need a backup plan, right? But they were right. That's what we did. And the first night, we just read scripture, worshiped, we had communion, and we were ending with one final song, and I just felt the Holy Spirit nudge me. There's more. So I caught the worship leader's eye, and I just went like this. And I said, just keep going, keep going. So he just kept playing different songs, and we waited on the Spirit, and first one and then another, and Then another. And pretty soon a bunch of these students got up, walked across the room, found someone they were estranged from, a friend or a roommate they'd been fighting with, and they went and to that person and they reconciled. Or they went to someone from a different social group, you know, athlete versus non athlete or wealthy, not wealthy. They went to that different person of that different social group and prayed together. Some confessed their sins to each other. In some cases, it was people of different races who started talking in a very deep way and sharing their experiences at Stanford. And several white students came away with a much better understanding of what people of color were experiencing, even in a place like Stanford. Everything from racial slurs to patronizing comments. Some of those

white students told me later, I had no idea what people of color were going through here. They understood each other. Grudges got resolved that night. Divisions got unified that night. And there were a couple of students there who were not Christians at all, but had just been invited by a friend to go skiing in the rain. And so they were there. And some of them said to me afterwards, if this is what being a Christian is about, maybe I need to get to know Jesus. It was kind of a mini revival. And here's the point. We gave the Holy Spirit a weekend to do whatever he wanted with several hundred college students. And the thing the Holy Spirit wanted to do the most was reconciliation and unity. The Romans called the early Christians the third race because they didn't fit into any of the religious or political or racial categories in the Roman world. You know, Jew or Greek or Roman or African. They were all of those things combined into one community. So the Romans called them the third race. It was meant as a derogatory term, but the early Christians wore it as a badge of honor. And the Holy Spirit is doing something very unique here that is not happening in most churches, very few churches, one roof gathering like we did on Friday, of so many different ages and races and cultures and languages. Here's a picture of our last new members class 65 new members. Look at that. Look at that. It's the whole family of God, every tribe, tongue and nation. There was no strategic plan to make this happen. The Holy Spirit just started bringing different kinds of people here, and he is giving us a very important responsibility in this church and a very high privilege to show our country, our divided, anxious country, to heal our country by showing that in Jesus, very different kinds of people can come together in unity as children of God, redeemed in Jesus Christ, who tears down every dividing wall of hostility. Reconciles us to each other to show our divided, angry, anxious country and world that in him there is hope, in him there is unity. In him there is reconciliation in him there is joy as we become one in the only way we can become one which is in him. Jesus, thank you for the enormous responsibility and privilege you are giving us as a church to be the kind of community Acts 2 community our divided country and world needs to see. Lord, make us good stewards of this gift, of this call, of this responsibility that you have called us to. Lord, help us through the power of your Holy Spirit to understand each other in all of our differences and in all of our disagreements that may never go away and yet still be one in you. Holy Spirit, you have done this before. You can do it again. We believe you're doing it here. Make us that

community that shows our world that there's a God and his name is Jesus and he heals all divisions in his name. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- God sends the Holy Spirit on Pentecost when there were people from every nation in Jerusalem so that the first church would be multi-ethnic, multi-generational, multi-cultural. Why is that kind of unity so important to God?
- Have you ever had a moment where you truly understood someone who was very different than you? What made that understanding possible?
- Who is someone or some group you struggle to understand? How might the Holy Spirit help you understand them more?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.