



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Giving God Room to Work in a Prevailing Church

Acts 2:1-13, 42-47

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Today is our First Fruits celebration for our Giving God Room to Work campaign. It begins on the day we celebrate Pentecost, the birthday of the church, when the Holy Spirit came to the hearts of the believers. In our passage, it had been only 50 days since the revolutionary event of Jesus' resurrection. What we are about to read together is the igniting of this group of about 120 believers into a wildfire, to take the message to the whole world. We here today are recipients of it. How else do you think we got here? Don't miss this miracle! *NIV Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."...(Then Peter preaches a sermon and 3,000 people came to faith in Christ).*

A lot of people are wondering where we're headed with this campaign...Let me say as clearly as I can: **Our journey is NOT about becoming a big church.** I am NOT interested in being just another large church. I am interested in being the Lord's church. But, **we must be a transforming church**, a faithful church. Because we have the cause of the Gospel and the courage of the Holy Spirit; and that's a power that will make you young when you're old, and live when you die. With the mind of Christ in you, we *can be* a transforming church where discouraged folks cheer up, dishonest folks 'fess up, sour folks sweeten up, depressed folks look up, closed folks open up, gossips shut up, conflicted folks make up, sleeping folks wake up, lukewarm folks fire up, dry bones shake up, and pew potatoes stand up. Amen? But most of all, in a transforming church, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up! God is calling *us* to be an emerging church to prevail in carrying His message to all the world: Not a hotel for saints, but a hospital for sinners...a transforming church! If *this* journey were just about growing numerically, it would be one thing. But listen: If we *never* grow numerically, I would be fine with that; as long as we were growing in our *transformation* of becoming like Christ, inviting His presence in, like a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire. What if we never grow because we just keep sending people to other places to carry out the mission?

What does this process feel like? A coffee house? A health club? House churches? Small groups? I don't know exactly, but I *do* know the 21st Century church will gather, grow, and go. Gather people, grow in Christ, and go out into the world. It will involve:

1. Worship—and the celebration of God working in our midst.
2. Honesty and forgiveness and healing
3. Experiencing God who is transforming of our lives!

4. Being authentic.

The problem is, when you find people being authentic, helping each other and really connecting with one another and God, you will have to lock the doors to keep people away.

People are desperate for connection

—to know somebody really cares.

People are desperate for meaning

—to know their life matters and has purpose.

People are desperate for transformation

—to know their past doesn't have to be their future.

People are desperate for God

—to know the Creator of the universe cares for them personally.

In the 21st Century, people are also more broken than ever before.

People have more alternatives than ever before.

People are more busy than ever before.

What a great time to be alive!

What a great time to be given the message of salvation in Christ!

What a great time to be the Church – His body on earth!

So forget size. Church happens when you help your neighbor. Remember the 120 in the Upper Room? Let's not worry about the size of our church numerically, but spiritually. Let's grow our willingness to be transformed by God! You can put your trust in Him. He is faithful, no matter what you are facing.

Nelson Mandela, was in Robin Island Prison for 27 years (from 1962-1990!). He sacrificed his private life and his youth for his people. Why did he do this? Mandela said "*Ending Apartheid is a cause which I will gladly invest every day of my life, and for which I would gladly die.*"

What purpose. What meaning. What impact he has had. Do YOU have a worthy cause? Do you have uncompromising courage? Are there any causes in your life for which you would *gladly* die? What if there were, what then? Would you join it? What if an entire community were united in that cause and courage?

What if there were a worthy cause, and what if you were part of a community of uncompromising courage? There was once. It was a community of believers totally devoted to God—radical in love toward one another. It manifested as a spirit of boldness, health, and wholeness, with the people wanting others to experience it too. Let's listen further into Acts 2, after Peter's preaching that moved people to repentance and belief: *42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

They did it with gladness. They wouldn't shut up! They prayed bold prayers and God answered. They all had gifts. They each did their part. Walls came down. They even had "favor with the people in the city". They weren't just viewed as nutcases! God's Spirit in them enabled them to speak to people's needs and hurts. They made a positive impact.

If one community like that existed, **why can't it exist again?** Why can't it exist again? Till my dying breath, I'll cast the vision. *When I was younger*, Jesus said "Cancel your career plans and give the rest of your life to me." I knew the pull of the lesser dream....But it was like he said "Are you going to sell out your one and only life? Will you be disappointed when you look back and realize all we could have done together over the last 60 years?" Church, I think Jesus' Spirit is speaking to us: Why not give your church to me? Why not give your lives to me? Easy, huh? Not!

Here's why not: Because for most of us, **our lives are a carefully balanced compromise**. It's that simple. Our lives are a *carefully balanced compromise*. Like the hokey pokey: "You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out" and spin around and around and around. That's what it's all about? Well, quit that! Risk something! Or do you get to the end of your life and think "I never even tried..."

Why can't it exist again? Can *we* be like those early Christ-followers? Yes! That prevailing church *can* exist again: reaching out, teaching, in life together, sharing common meals and prayers. It's there in Acts 2. (Ask somebody to lunch!) The prevailing church can exist in transformed lives, harmony, meeting each others' needs, celebrating, and worship. Let's all let the Word of God transform us. Masks off! Let's pray for outlandish things! Do the Acts 2 thing. Let go of your carefully balanced compromises, and embrace Christ!

When you do, you become transformed. And no matter how long you've been a Christian, it still feels new. The challenge of bringing Christ to a lost and broken world is the greatest challenge you will ever face—no matter what your occupation is: student, teacher, homemaker, or in the marketplace. People need the Lord. ETERNITY IS ON THE LINE. The overall importance of this cannot be over-estimated.

Note that Peter isn't just talking to people who are going to be pastors. Peter is talking to every believer. Today, you as a volunteer are the pillar person that Acts 2 is talking about! Praying for the salvation of people. Praying for friends and family far away from God. Nelson Mandela would say it: *Don't* give your life over to a lesser dream.

The local church really *is* the hope of the world, because we have the message of the Gospel. There was an ugly dog fight at Wylie School last week and a new rule went out in an email. But have you ever seen 2 kids fight? It's more ugly. Sometimes when I see it I trace the trajectory of a kid's life. Fists to knives to guns to jail to death to hell. Is there any possibility of a turnaround? Who could intervene? Who has the power to change or better yet transform that kid fighting? The school?...The government?...An invention?... Super Nanny?...or a prevailing church of Jesus Christ!? *Does that kid know* there is a love in heaven with his name on it? What if someone were to say to him, "If you let us, we'll love you." What else can change that kid's heart? There is only one power in the universe—the power of Jesus Christ and the message is entrusted to the local church. Do YOU know there is a love in heaven with your name on it? Does every person you meet or at least have influence over know that there is a love in heaven with their name on it?

I believe that. That's the power of the Holy Spirit in the prevailing church. And the courage you need to share it is the Holy Spirit's power that will give GOD room to work in you.

Why would you invest anywhere else? Do you see the progression? Change a church, and you change a life. Begin changing lives, and you change a community. Change more and more people,...and you'll change the world.

I can see it! I get it! *I'll* use my life and my resources and my talents for *that*! We'll *build* the church—the hope of the world, from the inside out, just like Acts 2. You are at the front end of the only force that can change the world. I like other causes. I give to other causes. Just none the equal of the church. When the church prevails, everybody wins! You and I have inherited a cause—the Gospel of Jesus. We've been handed the courage—His Holy Spirit in our lives. We will take the time right now to lay down our lives for Him—in communion, prayer, and our offering before the altar—that we may be transformed and part of a prevailing church that will change the world for the cause of Christ.