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Welcome to the New Life Podcast and Ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, verses 1 through 21. When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as a fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

01:10

and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished saying, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear?

01:40

each of us in his own native language. Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontius and Asia. Phrygia and Pamphylia and Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytites, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them telling in our own languages the mighty works of God.

02:09

And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, what does this mean? But others, mocking, said, they are filled with new wine. But Peter, standing with the 11, lifted up his voice and addressed them. Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be

known to you and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.

02:37

But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. And in the last days it shall be, God declares that I pour out my spirit on all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. And your young men shall see visions. And your old men shall dream dreams. Even on my male servants and female servants in those days, I will pour out my spirit. And they shall prophesy.

03:06

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. This is the word of the Lord.

03:37

In 1972, French scientist Michael Seifer entered a cave in Texas.

03:45

He took nothing with him whatsoever that he could use to tell time or know what day of the year it was. No watch, no clock, no calendar. He entered into the utter darkness, absent of any natural light or connection with anything in creation whatsoever, apart from rocks. No human connection. And he locked himself in and he stayed for almost 200 days. Now,

04:12

He had done this before, several years before. He did this for about two months. And he learned some interesting things. One of the things he learned is that in this kind of deprivation from other human contact, contact with other animals, plants, and especially contact with the sun and the natural circadian rhythm that we have 24 hours, he lost all sense of time. One of the experiments they did was for him to

04:42

count to 120 with one number per second, which would be two minutes. But when he would do it, it would take about five minutes or longer. He would sleep when he needed to sleep. He would eat when he needed to eat. Sometimes he would sleep for two hours. Other times he would sleep for 13. And he would never know the difference. He was supposed to be underground for six months. And when the time was up, they sent a message to him. They could communicate with him. And he could communicate with them in case of emergency.

05:10

If they did, the experiment was over. So they finally contacted him after the six months was up and said, your time is up. He thought they were joking because by his calculation, he had another month to go. So we learned a lot of interesting things about biocronology, how the circadian rhythm of the body works. And lots of people were interested in this, military scientists, space scientists interested in how humans would go and space travel long way from Earth without the rotation of the Earth to balance our circadian rhythm.

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But he also learned something he didn't intend to learn. One of the things he learned was that absent of human connection and connection with creation, the human mind slowly goes insane.

05:52

He didn't experience this this much in the two months, but after when he was in the ground for six months, he began to experience severe depression, profound loneliness, anxiety, and hallucinations. Hearing things, seeing things, etc. When he came back to the surface, these effects did not go away. He was permanently feeling the effects of them, had permanent damage to his psychology, to his mind.

06:21

So one of the things we learned is that yes, absent of human contact and interaction with creation, the human brain, the human person cannot withstand it. Similar experiments were done in the 60s and 70s along these lines. military scientists, some people wanting to invent new ways of brainwashing people and torturing them. They did these experiments with college students in the United States and Canada. Our ethics rules would never allow these to happen.

06:52

Today, if any of you are in experimentation, you know there's lots of complex ethics rules with how we do scientific work, but back then it was a little more free-flowing. So they put these college students in sensory deprivation chambers, absent light, absent sound, and try to minimize touch as well. And what they found is that absent any contact with creation in these sort of chambers, within two hours they would start to sing to themselves in order to maintain connection with something.

07:21

And then after 48 hours their minds were completely gone. They would hallucinate, they would see things, would hear things, voices. They would think people, something was touching them, shocking them. They would see animals, squirrels, trains, whatever. Their brain was inventing a world, I guess exactly what would happen. The thing that we learned is absent the kind of contact that God made us for, we cannot exist. We can't go on living. We were made for this. Now, evolutionary biologists would say that the reason why we have this

07:51

develop this need for contact in our psyche as a survival mechanism. We need others to survive. We need communities to survive. We need to get food. We need to have safety. And so we developed this adaptation. Well, I'm not here to challenge necessarily the findings of scientists, and maybe after church some of us will have a conversation about what we think this is scientifically. But as a theologian, I can tell you that the reason why the human mind cannot exist absent contact with God's creation is because God made us.

08:21

for community. He made us for relationship. We see this all the way in the very beginning. We have the story of creation in Genesis 1 and Genesis chapter 2. In Genesis chapter 1 we have the refrain, and it was good, and God saw that what he made was good, and God saw that it was good, and at the end it was very good. When we come to chapter 2 we have the extended story of the creation of Adam and Eve, and how

08:50

more detail about how they were created. And what we find is that with the creation of Adam, actually he wasn't called Adam yet, he was called Ish, which sounds like the Hebrew word for fire, and so one biblical scholar that I know says it would be something like Flambeau. Flamy, Flambeau. We'll go with Flambeau. So here he is created and God says it is not good. It is not good that man would be alone.

09:21

We were not created to be alone. We were created to be in relationship. And so God rectified this. He put Ish and Flambeau into a deep sleep. He took out a rib. He formed from the rib Ischach, Flambeet, his partner, his companion, his lover. And so God gave relationship to humanity. We are created for this. We were created to live in this created world.

09:48

to experience it. And absent of that, we can't exist. Another reason why we have this need for community is we are created in the image of God. The Bible says this in many places. The end of Genesis chapter 1 verse 28, it says we were made in the image of God, male and female, He created them. And as God is triune, as we'll talk about next week on Trinity Sunday, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three persons.

10:14

and perfect love and community and fellowship and intimacy for all eternity. If we are created in God's image, then we are created to be relational. We are created to need community. We are created for intimacy and for relationship. This is a part of how we are

made. You know, the French philosopher John Paul Sartre said, hell is other people. Actually, he's wrong. Hell is...

10:42

absence of other people. Without it, we will lose our minds. And as the description of Michael Seifer, he called his experience in the cave his personal hell. Now, if absence from other people becomes untenable for human creatures, how much more absence from God? I would say that every human being has a need for God and God's presence. Every single human being, whether they know it or not,

11:12

You know, I would place that in our sense of awe and transcendence. Every person has a sense of the need for transcendence, for beauty, for joy, at a starry sky, at a beautiful sunrise or sunset, at the birth of a child, with the love of another person. I would place this need for transcendence, for wonder, for beauty, as what our

11:40

tradition of theologians called the seed of divinity. Part of the image of God being placed in every human person means that we all have the seed of divinity. We all have something of God within us and we all have something of a need for God. As French philosopher and scientist Blaise Pascal said, we all have a God-shaped vacuum in our hearts and as St. Augustine said, and we read earlier today, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Every human person was created with this need. I think

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That's what explains our sense, our need for all transcendence and beauty.

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But in fact, I also believe, as we read in the psalm a little bit earlier today, that if absence from human beings causes a human to lose it within weeks or days, if we were to truly be absent from the presence of God, we would instantaneously be...

12:37

This is what it says in Psalm 104. And we read this just a few seconds ago. I'll go over it. Verse 24. Psalm 104 is a psalm of creation. It goes through all the works of creation. It's a beautiful psalm. Probably written by David as Psalm 103 is written by David and it seems like they're both a unit. People can disagree. It doesn't have a whole lot of meaning but we'll just say David probably wrote it. Verse 24. Oh Lord, how manifold. Another way we can say this is diverse.

13:07

are your works. In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures." And then he goes on to list several of the creatures. Then in verse 27, these all look to you to give them their food in due season. When you give it up to them, they gather it up. When you open your hand, they are filled with good things. In verse 29, when you hide your face, they are dismayed.

13:33

When you hide your face, they are dismayed. When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. Absent the presence of God, I think every single human being would be undone immediately. Yes, God is present with all in this world, in this creation. We call this common grace in our theological tradition. There is special grace given to believers, saving grace, faith,

14:03

that brings us salvation, redemption, and relationship with God. But there's also common grace that is given to all. The rain is sent to the just and the unjust alike. The Spirit of God restrains evil in the world. If the Spirit of God did not do this, the world would not be a habitable place. And so God is present with everyone and every human being actually needs this, whether they know it or not.

14:30

And if this presence was taken away, we would be undone in a second. When you hide your face, we are dismayed. This is the essence of what Christianity is really about. God is with us. God is with us. In a general way with His creation, but in a specific and special way with His people.

14:56

I think this is unique amongst religions. If you look at other religions, most religions are based off some form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is from the Greek word gnosis which means knowledge. And generally what other religions are doing is trying to find God by raising up, elevating your thoughts, your behavior, meditating, achieving detachment, nirvana, through some special knowledge, some special understanding.

15:25

The idea is that our bodies don't give us reliable information about ourselves, the reality that's around us is not really real, we are seeking the transcendent, the divine, elsewhere. What's unique about Christianity and Judaism, because the story is in the Old Testament and to some extent Islam, although not completely, but these religions who are based on the Abrahamic tradition, is that God joins us. God comes and lives with us.

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Jesus Christ when he was born was called Emmanuel, which means God with us. But there's a sense in which this doesn't really happen until Pentecost. As I was thinking about Pentecost Sunday and what I would say, I've probably preached on this topic at least 10 times since I've been a pastor through the years. The idea of God with us kept coming back to me. There's a sense in what we see here in Acts chapter 2 is the fulfillment of Emmanuel.

16:25

God with us. Jesus himself said, must go away so that the comforter can come. When we read that the Spirit of God falls upon these believers at Pentecost, God is coming to dwell with them in a new, in a different, in a personal way. So we're going to explore three things about this notion of God with us that we see in the Bible and in this text from Acts.

The first is that God is with his people. The second is God is with all peoples. And the third is God is with you. So first, God is with his people. This is really the story of the Old Testament. God is with his people. The story of the Old Testament really begins in Exodus chapter 1. Genesis is there to give us the story leading up to those events. Not to take anything away from Genesis at all. It's scripture.

When we come to Exodus chapter 1, we find the people of God, the people that are result of God's covenant with Abraham that we start reading in Genesis 12, in Genesis 15, in Genesis 17. We find these people of God and they're in Egypt and they are in slavery to the Egyptians and they're being oppressed by the Egyptians and they are crying out for deliverance. And we see God come and deliver them. He comes to them.

And he delivers them. And in Exodus there's no question who's doing the work. There's no question who's doing the seeking. There's no question who's doing the acting. It is all God. It's not even Moses. I mean it's very clear. It's not Moses' power. It's not Aaron's power. It is completely of God. God does the work. God does the miracles. God delivers them from the Egyptians. And God throws the mightiest army in the earth into the Red Sea and destroys them. It is all of God. And from that point on, God

[illegible]

God made his dwelling with his people. And from that point on, God lived with them. The physical manifestation was a pillar of cloud and fire. The glory cloud, the Shekinah glory.

He instructed his people how to build his house. The instructions are in the book of Exodus. It was called the Tabernacle. So they built it for him, and he moved in. And he lived with them. For 1,000 years he lived with them. First in the Tabernacle, and then when Solomon built the temple.

19:14

He moved in there, the glory cloud moved in, and God dwelt with his people. And there they could meet with him, there they could hear from him, there they could offer the sacrifices of worship to him. And there they could go to worship. And so, in the Old Testament, people went to God's house to worship. was to Jerusalem, to the temple where God dwells. God lived with his people all throughout their infidelity, all throughout their rebellion.

19:41

The story of the Old Testament is over and over. God's people sinned, God's people rebelled, they worshiped false idols, they committed grievous evils, and they got themselves into trouble, and they cried out to God, and He delivered them. Over and over and over and over and over He did. Because He's their God. And we are His people. But then we get to a point in Ezekiel chapter 10, and most people don't realize this.

20:09

But there was a point in the Old Testament where God moved out. We read about it in Exodus chapter 10, the glory cloud departed. And it wasn't as if God was rejecting Israel. Paul is very clear about this in Romans 9 through 11 and other places. But it was the fact that God was going to manifest himself in a new way, in a new covenant. And so God's glory cloud departed just before the exile. The Babylonians destroyed the first temple.

20:38

When the second temple was rebuilt, the glory cloud didn't come back. When we read about the temple in the New Testament, it's not there. The smoky, fiery presence of God's not there. Jesus has come on the scene and He is the presence of God Almighty. And so when the glory departs from Israel, which is what Ichabod means, when the glory departs

from Israel, it comes back with a new covenant. And what we are seeing here in the text today, in Acts chapter 2, having done a little survey of the whole Old Testament,

21:08

We are seeing the manifestation of the glory cloud back with his people. God's moving back in. And where is he moving? In the hearts of all the faithful. These little flames of fire upon each individual person's head represent the glory cloud, the Shekinah glory. God's moving back in. God is with his people. He is present with his people. He is among his people. This is how Jesus can say,

21:37

that whenever two or three are gathered together, I will be in the middle of you. This is how we can worship God throughout all the earth. We don't have to go to a central place of worship because wherever we are gathered, God's dwelling is there. So God is with his people. God is with us. And there's all sorts of applications to this point. There's all sorts of things that we could drive home with this truth. But let's focus on at least one.

22:06

The fact that God is with his people should give us confidence in all sorts of areas in our life. The fact that it is he who does the redemptive work, he who saves us, he who redeems us, he who sanctifies us, and he dwells with us. And if God dwells with his people and he promises never to leave or forsake us, Jesus says, then if we are dwelling with God's people in God's house, we have the promise that he will be with us. We have the confidence that he will be with us.

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This is the confidence that David was reading about in the Confession of Sin from Romans 8. The confidence that we have because we have the Spirit of God within us. God dwells with us. He dwells with us and we are His people. And that will never change. The second thing we see in this text in Acts chapter 2 is that God is with all peoples. God is with all peoples.

23:06

The beautiful part, one of the beautiful aspects of this story is this moment where the Spirit falls upon the 120 disciples in the upper room. They begin to speak in other languages. They spill out in the street. And all the people that are gathered for Pentecost, all the Jewish diaspora from all over the Roman Empire, it says every nation under heaven is there. They began to hear

23:34

the wonders of God being spoken in their own languages. And this is not just a fun story. This isn't just some kind of a circus act. This is a theologically significant redemptive historical event. This means that the curse of Babel is undone, and this means that the religion of Yahweh is no longer ethnically, monoculturally centered. If you think about most religions, they're pretty...

24:03

linguistically, ethically, and monoculturally centered. It's one language, one culture. In fact, know, so exactly, I keep picking on Islam, but it's a good example of most of the stuff I'm talking about. So in Islam, the Quran is only properly read and heard in Arabic. Now, it can be translated and you can read it, but it's only in Arabic. And of course Islamic culture is pretty monocultural, and you're expected to conform to that when you convert. The beauty of this message is that

24:31

All people's tongues and languages are brought into the kingdom of God. All these languages are spoken at Pentecost to show that these are all the languages of the earth are authorized languages for scripture. And if you think about it, the New Testament scriptures are written in Greek. Now, I know Greek is a culture, it's an ethnicity, but Greek was the most common language of that day. If you wanted to pick any language that most of the people around could read, it would be Greek.

24:57

And in fact, the kind of Greek that the New Testament is written in is called Koine, which means common. God literally put His word into the most universal language He could to demonstrate that all languages and peoples are now a part of His kingdom. All languages and peoples are a part of His kingdom. God is for all peoples. All peoples.

25:19

Now there are many applications of this, again, but those of us who've been involved in missions, and I'll just speak on this for a moment, are especially keen on this. Because it's not the job of us, it's not the job of missionaries to export American Christianity all around the world.

25:39

Missionaries, especially those who have been formed by a lot of the mistakes that have been made over the past decades. These days, most missionaries that are in this kind of work are keen on not exporting our American culture and insisting on churches all over the world being like us, but to raise up indigenous leaders so that they can lead the church into their own culture being disciplined by Jesus. So that their own culture, their own languages, their own custom, their own food, their own music,

26:08

becomes the expression of God. That's the beauty of the diversity of God's kingdom after Pentecost. And we know that this is not just a feature of the fallen world, this is a feature of the eschaton, because we read in Revelation that there will be a multitude gathered from all people's tongues tribes on the earth praising God in their own languages. The beauty of the diversity of his creation will be reflected in the fact that all people's

26:36

are a part of God's kingdom and therefore that means that we don't have, we don't try to transform a culture into our own when we do missionary work which a lot of other religions will do that. So we're not monocultural, we're multicultural. Now, it is a sort of fact that any particular church is going to have a culture. Like our church has a culture, right? It's mostly influenced by Western European music and norms.

27:05

some by Southern stuff because of me, right? And other influences, American, New York, whatever. We have a culture, that's okay. But what the problem is, if we insist on other churches of other cultures and other places being just like us. Every church, every mission has to be inculturated. But I want to take this one step further. It's not just that people's tongues, languages, cultures...

27:35

food, music, gets to express Christianity in its own way all over the world, it's that we learn from each other. Right? We're not just to allow or permit other churches to pursue their own culture, we are to learn from them. We're intended to learn from other cultures, languages, cuisine, music, and not in a way that is inappropriate, but in a way that reflects the beautiful diversity of God's kingdom.

28:04

to bring that into our own worship of God in our own life. And so not only is every culture being disciplined by the Lord Jesus as it takes up the church, but we are supposed to be learning from each other as that happens, because that's the way God created it to be. So God is with his people, God is with all peoples, and thirdly, God is with you.

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This is an inescapable part of this text.

28:34

As someone who teaches and adheres to covenant theology, I'm always going to emphasize the corporate, the covenantal, the fact that God has a people. That we're not individualistic in our pursuit of faith. We're community and covenantal oriented. But that doesn't mean that is at the expense of the individual, right? It is very clear in this text that these tongues of fire appear on every single person.

29:03

That means a huge change has occurred in the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, it's not just one temple place that has the fiery presence of God. It is every single believer who believes in Christ and who is regenerated by God, receives the Holy Spirit, and becomes a dwelling place for God Almighty. God is with you. God is in you. For those that believe in Him, God is present with us.

29:32

And we gather together as people, two or three are gathered in His name, we worship God together, we become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Whenever Paul talks about us being the temple of the Holy Spirit, it is plural, it is y'all are the temple of Holy Spirit every time we see it. But, we are individually members of that, of that body. And so he makes application. He makes application about our ethics.

29:59

about the way we handle ourselves, if we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, if we are the dwelling place of the Most High, it affects how we live. It should affect how we act, the things that we do. There are all sorts of applications of this, but I'm going to focus on this one and let us close with it.

30:17

God Almighty, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the creator and sustainer of the entire universe, who created the massive universe that we can observe like flicking a marble. That mighty God lives in you. That means that you are precious, you are glorious. Whatever the Old Testament says about human beings in our created state, that we are crowned with glory and honor.

30:46

When we get to this point in history, that's true of all human beings to an extent, when we get to this point in history, when the presence of God Almighty comes to reside in believers, the dignity that we possess as believers in Christ is unfathomable. God Almighty lives

within us. we even, well just said, can we fathom it? We cannot. But what that means is you are precious in His sight, you are worthy, worth much to Him because He lives within you.

31:15

And of course that should affect how we live, how we act. But I want you to think about how you think about yourself. And what you say about yourself. Because those things I think are so important just to our faith and to our life. God is within you. And that means that you... I mean, you're amazing. You're amazing. Because He... because of His grace. Because of His love. You know recently this...

31:46

my family, I'm in the middle of a pretty heavy travel season. It happens every year from April to June. A lot of it is denominational stuff. So a couple weeks ago I was at a PCA meeting and in two weeks I'm going to be at the General Assembly. I'll be gone a week. Whenever I'm traveling, whenever I'm away from home, and those of you who travel for business or something else, you know this too, but whenever I'm traveling, whenever I'm away from home, you know my family knows I exist, right?

32:15

They know I exist. We can talk to each other. We can talk on the phone. We can text. We can send email. So we know they know I exist. I know they exist. We have communication. But it's not the same. It's not the same. And something is not full. Something is not right until I come home. Even if I come home after everybody's in bed, there's something about me coming back home and us being back together in our house that makes it more full, makes it more right.

32:44

for us. You know, we don't just know God exists some far off place, off in the far reaches of the universe. We know we can talk to Him, we can pray to Him. But no, it's just not right. It's not well in our souls until God lives with us. And He does. For those who believe in Christ, who are saved and washed by His blood, God lives with you. He is with us as His people.

33:15

And God is with all peoples and languages of the earth. And most significantly, think God is with you. The living God dwells within you. And that my friends should give us hope and confidence in our lives and in our faith. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested.

33:42

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