

The New Normal: A Family Fully Formed  
Acts 2:1-21

The New Normal. That is the phrase I am hearing constantly these days. This is what the new normal will be like. I even used it myself to describe what the church would look like and how services would run once we were open again. The New Normal is being navigated by more than just churches. The NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL are all talking about what their respective leagues will look like in the coming months. Disney had shut down their parks in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and are now beginning to release protocols for what the customer experience will look like once they reopen. Each state is putting out guidelines and progressive charts to move through that describe what this new normal will look like for retail and restaurants. The New Normal means that life is changing. It means that things will now be permanently different. It means that many aspects of our daily lives will never go back to the way they were. This is cause for a lot of worry, anxiety, stress, and fatigue. Some jobs are gone forever. Some businesses will look completely different. What are we willing to adjust to and what will we fight against? It's an incredible time to be alive, having to learn what our new lives will look like.

Today is Pentecost and we are beginning a new sermon series called "The New Normal". As Jesus ascends, he promises his Holy Spirit and empowers the disciples to begin a new movement called the Church. Life will never be the same. Things are different now. For those who follow Jesus. For those who belong to this Church, there is a new normal. You can't go back to the old way of living and thinking and doing. You are charged to be something different. You are given a new identity and purpose as you enter into the life of the church. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, forgiven through the blood of Jesus, we now live a new normal. That's what we will be exploring in this series. The church has now been established in the wind and fire of Pentecost. Where do we go from here? What does this new normal look like? What does life in the church, as a Christian, need to look like. What is expected of us? What do our lives need to reflect and what do we need to speak up for? Jesus has ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father. His kingdom is coming soon. His reign is now. This is the new normal, so what are we supposed to be doing? Where do we go from here?

We kick off this conversation by looking at the day of Pentecost itself. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised that the Holy Spirit would come upon the disciples as they entered back into Jerusalem. Today we celebrate and remember that moment when the disciples went from confused followers to bold leaders. This was the beginning of the movement known as the Church. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples stand in front of the crowds of people gathered in Jerusalem and speak the gospel story. There are many things you can take from this holy day. You've probably heard many sermons about this moment. It was the greatest sermon ever preached. The transformation of the apostles was now complete. They stepped into this new life, this new normal and never looked back. Roughly three thousands new believers were added to the family of God that day. Many of them baptized in that moment. It's an incredible event in the history of God's people. But what does this teach us about the new normal? What do we learn about the church and our role in the world from this Pentecost moment?

Now, you may not know that Pentecost is not originally a Christian festival day. Pentecost was a Jewish day of celebration. It was the fiftieth day after Passover known as the Festival of Weeks. It is a celebration of harvest going back to Exodus that gathered people from all over the known world into the city of Jerusalem. So, when the disciples stood up and preached the message of Jesus, they were speaking to a diverse group of people from all over. The people gathered there were from Egypt and Libya, Mesopotamia and Asia, Rome and Cappadocia. There were Medes, Parthians and Elamites. There was a vast array of ethnicities and languages gathered in Jerusalem, many celebrating the harvest while others were just visitors to this major city. God chose this moment and this group of people to start his Church. He used these disciples at this point in history to gather people to himself. In Pentecost we see God undoing the work at the Tower of Babel when all were dispersed and given different

languages. He is drawing people back to himself. Through the Spirit, the disciples began speaking the precious gospel of Jesus in every language represented in the crowds. Every person standing there heard of God's love in the crucified and risen Jesus in their own native tongue.

God is expanding his family right before our eyes. It was well known before this that God's family were the chosen ones of Israel. God's children were Jewish, given that identity from the moment Abraham was called out of Ur. If you weren't Jewish then you were a Gentile, outside the chosen nation. Could you really belong to God if you were a Gentile? Well, yes. Throughout scripture we see many outside the family of Israel being grafted in but Pentecost is this event when it is explicitly made known that all are welcome into God's family. None are excluded. The only thing required is that you are a sinner in need of the saving that comes only from Jesus. The New Normal is being laid out for us in Pentecost. The family of God is not exclusive. The family of God is not tied to a specific language, ethnicity, or skin color. God reaches out to all people gathered in Jerusalem with their own language, welcoming them into his family. This is the new normal. This is a family now fully formed. Because of Pentecost there is now no reason for people to be left out. No nation ignored. No skin color excluded. The gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, all nations, meant to be brought to every corner of the earth and every neighborhood in our community.

This comes on the heels of civil unrest rearing its ugly head in our country. Fires burning not as tongues of fire on the heads of the disciples but destroying major cities in our country. Pentecost confronts us with some tough questions. Have you kept the gospel from people? Have you refused to share the gospel with people who need it? Here's something that might be a bit uncomfortable. Have you ever felt like you couldn't share the love of Jesus Christ with someone because of their skin color? Do we see people who aren't like us and determine that they won't really fit in so why even bother reaching out? I'm not lobbing accusations of racism. I'm not saying that you are secretly bigoted and you just don't know it. I've seen those words online lately and they are never constructive. This isn't even exclusive to skin color. It could be ethnicity or socioeconomic status or the clothes they wear or the job they work. There are many things that make us different from one another that keep us from sharing God's love. What if the disciples allowed these things to hold them back? What if the disciples looked out into that bustling crowd of people and thought, "they aren't like me so I shouldn't even try reaching them"? What if the disciples surveyed the crowd and decided by any number of things that they weren't alike enough to hear the story of salvation?

God establishes his church for all nations. God's love is for all people without prerequisite or hesitation. God shows us clearly today that his Spirit makes no distinction and neither should his children. The Holy Spirit of God bridges all divides and divisions and it uses us to do it. The new normal is this diverse family of God, centered around the cross of Christ. The new normal is a fully formed family of God that unites, despite our differences, around the grace and forgiveness found in Jesus. Where do we go from here now that we know this new normal? We reach out to those who are different than us. We show the love of God without discrimination or hesitation. This is especially difficult because we already have a hard time talking to others who are like us about Jesus. We need to be the ones speaking words of hope, love, grace, and forgiveness to all nations. We sit back and let others bridge these divides with messages that push people further apart. We stay quiet and let other people speak across cultures with a message that doesn't bring about the permanent change that the gospel offers. Where are we? What are we doing? Why can't we step outside ourselves, our circles, our tribes and speak the only message that truly changes hearts? The language of God is forgiveness in Christ, resurrection from the dead, and unconditional love. The family of God is fully formed for us today in the fire and wind of Pentecost. Because of this, as we face the divisions of today, we need what this incredible event means more than ever.

As we begin to step out into the world from a COVID-19 quarantine, interactions with people will be different. Birthday parties are still attended with hesitation. Graduations are still drive through at the moment. Families are beginning to see each other in the flesh for the first time in months. Major sporting events will resume and theme parks will be reopened. There is a

new normal for these interactions. You second guess taking kids to the grocery store. You question whether to continue having those large family gatherings. Masks are worn and distancing measures are still taken. This new normal is confusing and we are still figuring it out. As you establish your new normals coming out of quarantine, make some of those new normals interacting with people who aren't like you. Not just interacting but sharing meaningful words of friendship, grace, and God's love. The gospel of Jesus is the perfect message to bridge those differences. Jesus died for the whole world, not just some that looked like him. He conquered sin and death for all people, not just those who spoke the same language. He earned forgiveness and eternal life for all nations, not just those who shared his personal opinions and beliefs. What unites us in the family of God isn't the blood in our veins but the blood pouring out of Jesus' veins. See with his eyes. Speak by His Spirit. Love as he first loved us. That is our call. That is our new normal as the Church and followers of Christ. We must lead with love as an example for a world that doesn't understand unity. We must lead by showing them what a true family looks like, centered on Christ. Happy Pentecost! May God move you by his spirit to be his witnesses to all nations, every tribe and tongue. Amen.