

I AM With You

Pentecost, every nation under heaven, and the God who seeded the world with the gospel

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, May 23, 2021
PASSAGES	Acts 2:5-13; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 2:36; Matthew 28:18-20; Genesis 12:3; Revelation 5:9; Ephesians 4:3; Ephesians 4:32
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:55:57 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Pentecost was not only the birth of the Spirit-filled church; at the same moment God birthed its global mission, with Jews “from every nation under heaven” hearing his mighty works in their own languages. No committee planned it. Because Jesus is already at work in the harvest and has said “I am with you,” we can speak of him without anxiety, stand with the nations, and work with the whole church in our city.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ “I am with you” has a long biblical history: when God says it, he means he will do the heavy lifting and is asking us to come along.
- ◆ The church was always designed to be filled to overflowing and led by the Spirit – sensing God’s presence, seeing his power, and saying “God’s at work,” not “look how great I am.”
- ◆ At the very moment God birthed the church, he birthed its international mission. God planned it, all on his own.
- ◆ Each listener heard in “his own native language” – God uses the most familiar means so the message reaches people in a form they can receive. There are people only you can reach.
- ◆ Peter preached the resurrection, and three thousand believers from across the world carried it home. God seeded the ground long before Paul arrived.

- ◆ Pentecost was a glimpse of Revelation 5: every tribe and tongue hearing the Lord together, without division.
- ◆ So: speak of Jesus without fear, offer to pray, support church planting and disciple-making abroad with prayer and money, and honor those who bridge into other language groups in our own city.

► 0:56:35

Geno began with a pastoral plea as Hope eased its COVID policies “in fits and starts, not always to everybody’s great joy.” We don’t know who is vaccinated, who has a compromised immune system, or who is caring for someone vulnerable, so “we should bend over backwards in our kindness one to another” to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – and he quoted a verse from a song he learned as a new Christian in the 1970s:

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

EPHESIANS 4:32 ↗ (KJV)

He invited people to a listening session with the board – eight people who do not all think alike and work hard to hear the Lord together – and thanked Melody, Hope’s new first-Sunday worship leader.

“I am with you”

► 1:00:07

Geno gave “props” to Matt, whose sermon weeks earlier had struck him: in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) we stress “go and make disciples,” but the last phrase may be the most important – “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Geno had taught the passage many times. “When he said that, I went, oh, of course.”

► 1:01:48

Gideon, asking for the fleece wet and then dry, did not understand that when God said “I am with you,” he meant: I am going to do it, and I’m asking you to come along. God said it to Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others. “This phrase is pregnant with meaning.”

► 1:02:22

Jesus was reaching for that concept with Jewish hearers who knew it: as you go, “I will go before you, I will clear a path, I will make a way where there is no way... as you just open up your mouth and share your journey with people that are far from God. Just go. I am with you.”

Pentecost: the church and its mission, born together

► 1:03:06

It was Pentecost Sunday, the day the Spirit fell on the 120 in the upper room and the people of God became a Spirit-energized, Spirit-led church. The church was always designed to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit, to feel deeply the presence of God and see his power, “and not make the mistake of thinking, look how great I am, but able to say, oh, God’s at work.” Geno counts himself among the Pentecostal, third-wave, charismatic people who emphasize the Spirit, “and Hope Chapel is one of those churches – mildly so.”

► 1:04:33

Most preaching on Acts 2 dwells on verses 1–4 – the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, other tongues. Ordinary people, filled with the presence of God for the first time in history: “that’s the church.”

► 1:05:06

But that may be “an improper emphasis on the wrong syllable.” From verse 5, at the exact same moment he birthed the church, God birthed its international, global mission. “There was not some clever mission committee somewhere that said, you know, we should gather Jews from all over the world and preach the gospel to them so that they can go back to their homes and talk about Jesus. Nobody planned that. God did that all on his own.” He had it in mind at least since Genesis 12: in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

► 1:07:00

This had become personal. Geno and PJ still meet over Zoom for Bible study with four former Chinese graduate students, now PhDs on both coasts. As he walks them through Israel and Jerusalem, they notice China is not listed anywhere – and it is his pleasure to say that God is a global God, and Jesus came for *panta ta ethnē*, all peoples. (Italians? Cornelius’s unit was “the Italian band” in the King James – “I used to play in one of those.”) This is the God of Revelation 5, with some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Every nation under heaven

► 1:09:05

“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, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.’ And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’”

ACTS 2:5-13 ↗

► 1:10:11

Pentecost was one of the three great feasts when every man who could was to come to Jerusalem; families planned the costly trip for years. “A giant camp-out,” and God used it to birth the church as an international project.

► 1:10:42

These were multilingual people – Aramaic on the street, the languages of the places they lived, perhaps biblical Hebrew. They were not thrown by hearing many languages. What astonished them was that each heard his own, from men they could tell were from somewhere else. And “these hicks shouldn’t be able to do this”: Galileans from up north were not expected to be multilingual. “Native language” means the language of the heart.

► 1:14:14

On a map, Jerusalem sat at the center of concentric circles of nations. Most of these Jews descended from those scattered six to eight hundred years earlier by Assyria and Babylon. And Luke does not say every nation under Roman rule, though nearly all were. He says “every nation under heaven” – “Rome is not the boss. God is.”

► 1:15:45

Geno quoted Darrell Bock: “God is using for each group the most familiar linguistic means possible to make sure the message reaches to the audience in a form they can appreciate.”

► 1:16:21

“It’s why God has saved you, because there are people in your world, in your space, that only you can reach.”

The secret is not what you know but that you are you. People can hear Geno's accent and know he is from central Texas, not Wisconsin; those who sound and dress and eat like him are closer than a Chinese graduate student would be. And Bock again: Pentecost "underscores the divine initiative in making possible the mission that God has commissioned." Jesus himself was a Galilean – Peter was accused of being one too ([Matthew 26:69–73](#)).

► 1:18:06

Luke's list falls into groups: the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia; what is now Turkey – Cappadocia with its homes carved into soft stone, Pontus, Asia, Pamphylia, where the gospel first went with Paul; North Africa; visitors from Rome, Jews and God-fearers like Cornelius, from the empire's capital to a provincial city – "like men and women from Washington, D.C. going to Phnom Penh"; and Cretans and Arabs, desert nomads.

► 1:20:58

"In the instant the church was born, it immediately broke out of any kind of cultural, regional, religious ghetto." Geno kept repeating it to drill in "a confidence in God and his ways" – not a heavy yoke we can never carry, but walking with God into a world where he is already at work. "What's my next step? What are you doing? Let me follow you."

God seeded the world

► 1:22:14

Those pilgrims had been in the city a while. Most had surely heard of the latest messiah figure – the crowds at his entry, his arrest, trial, torture and execution, "just like all the other ones." What they had not heard were the rumors that he was alive. That was the crowd God gathered so Peter could preach the resurrection.

► 1:24:15

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

ACTS 2:36 ↗

► 1:25:04

Lord means boss; Christ means the long-awaited anointed one. "This Jesus whom you crucified – that was a sharp stick in the eye." No wonder three thousand asked what they must do. And they went home across the world with the message of the resurrection. God seeded the earth with Jews who had

believed, preparing the ground before Paul went town to town. “Paul was persuasive, he was educated, but God had seeded the ground. My guess is Paul ran into person after person who said, I was there, I remember.”

► 1:26:49

And for those with eyes to see, God gave a glimpse of heaven: every tongue and tribe hearing the Lord speak at once, appreciating culture and language “without division.” “You have Revelation 5 right here in Acts 2.”

So what do we do?

► 1:27:59

Geno warned that his conclusion would be long. First, evangelism and the global growth of the church happen “because Jesus is at work in the harvest,” not because of our plans. He is grateful for missiologists and apostolic visionaries, but every missiologist he knows would say the same: the people following Christ most closely are the ones getting it done.

► 1:29:04

So in Austin “we do not need to walk in anxiety” – Matt’s point, Geno said, that struck him hard. He has had his words thrown back in his face and hates being rejected, “which is kind of a weird psychology, because I’m very much an extrovert.” This is a word for people like him. “Speak it and watch what happens.” God has prepared the ground; he is already there.

► 1:30:23

We step into that story just by helping people far from God become followers of Christ – family, friends, our areas of influence – being who we are and offering to pray. When someone says they have had a headache for two days, “can I say a ten-second prayer for you?” The most common answer in decades of ministry: “Can’t hurt.” “Nobody’s ever spat on the ground because I prayed for him. So what are we afraid of?”

► 1:31:56

Second, we step into Pentecost’s international birthright by supporting church-planting and disciple-making movements across the world, mainly with prayer and money. Hope funds a GO pastor – global operations, Ceci Proger – “it was here before I got here... way to go, Hope Chapel.” “I think either we should be going or supporting... going or sending.”

► 1:33:53

Pray for the global operations team, led by Ceci and Deb: the pandemic has made work overseas exceedingly hard, many are leaving the field, and the team is reconsidering where Hope should go

next. And young people: “It’s time for another generation to step into the work. We need for you to rise up and say God is calling me, so that we can then say we believe it with you... go, we’ll send you.”

► 1:35:50

Finally, a value from Hope’s founder Dan Davis: Hope is one expression of the church in the city, not the church in the city. So it gives space to church plants cheaply or free, works with other ministries, and gathers with other congregations in Holy Week – not grudgingly, but because the idea springs from Pentecost: many nations and languages, one people.

► 1:37:27

His last call was simple. If you know someone who bridges into a language group in Austin you cannot reach, write them a thank-you card that day. Thank them for being the bridge, write a prayer for them, and ask the Lord whether to send support. “How simple is that?”

► 1:39:12

He prayed with thanks for God’s love for every people, and for “what a beautiful mosaic that will be when we get to heaven – what a fascinating bit of foreshadowing you gave to us on purpose there in Acts 2,” asking God to open our eyes to the global nature of the church right here in Austin.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Ephesians 4:3
- Ephesians 4:32 (KJV)
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Acts 2:1–4
- Genesis 12:3
- Revelation 5:9
- Acts 2:5–13
- Matthew 26:69–73
- Acts 2:36

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno said God birthed the church and its global mission at the same moment. Why do you think we so often separate the two?
2. The crowd heard God's mighty works "in our own native language." Who are the people in your world that you are uniquely placed to reach, and what is your "language" with them?
3. What makes you anxious about speaking of Jesus? How does "I am with you" – God doing the heavy lifting – speak to that fear?
4. Geno said we should be either going or sending. Where are you in that, and what might God be asking of you or of the young people you know?
5. Who do you know who bridges into another culture or language group here in Austin? Will you write them a thank-you card and a prayer this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt preached this Pentecost message at Hope Chapel, crediting an earlier sermon of Matt's for its starting point. He describes himself as a charismatic, third-wave believer and an extrovert who still hates rejection, and he and his wife, PJ, continue to study the Bible over Zoom with four former Chinese graduate students they have disciplined for years.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcxnmljzrNE&t=3357s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.