

Speaker 1:

In Chinese, the word crisis has two characters. One is danger and the other is opportunity. And I think that's good for us to reflect on today because we're in the midst of what seems to be a bit of a crisis and there is a bit of danger and we have to be concerned and use common sense and wash our hands and take care of each other. But I think there's also an opportunity in the midst of this. One of the great things about our faith is that God is in the business of transforming what is difficult and maybe have a sense of crisis to it into something good. And so I would give you a message today in terms of this time that there's an opportunity for you, an opportunity to reset, to reset yourself, to reset your family and loved ones.

And one of the ways we can reset is by reconnecting, reconnecting with family and loved ones. Right now we have more time than usual to be with the people we love and to be with family. So use this time as time well spent with them because you'll be able to spend more time with them at home. Learn to play together again, learn to pray together again, learn to listen to one another again. Another thing I recommend is you reconnect with yourself. It's a good time to get some much needed rest. I know some of you will be a away from work and at home, maybe some of you are working at home, but I think you'll have an opportunity to get much needed rest in your life and also to reconnect with God most of all.

I know many of you have made the promise that you're going to spend more time with God in devotional time and in prayer and read more scripture. Well, now you have the opportunity to do it, to set aside time in your home, in the quiet, to read more scripture, to grow deeper in your faith in God. And so use this time as an opportunity to do that. And now I [inaudible 00:02:04] have an opportunity to preach to you, and so I'd like to have a bit of a prayer before I go into my message I prepared for you today. Let's pray.

Lord, we do come to you with heavy hearts at this time. We know this is an unprecedented time for us. Things are happening so quickly, but we know, deep in our hearts, that you've got this and all will be well soon because you've promised to never leave us or forsake us. You said that in this world we will have trouble but you are always with us. And for that we're grateful. And let us draw strength from the fact that your presence is with us and you will never leave us, and that you can transform the worst things into something beautiful, into something good, and we count on that. And Lord, now you've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching your word to these, my friends and your servants. So I ask you to speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us here receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.

John the Baptist says something very interesting in the Gospel of Mark. He says this, "Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Now those are prophetic words, prophetic words that would soon come to pass on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit infused the church by the power of God and they began their mission of making disciples. It was an interesting day. The disciples were gathered together, together in this house, and all of a sudden it happened. Wind and fires swept through the disciples and many were astonished and amazed. In fact, some thought a fraternity party had broken out even though it was nine o'clock in the morning. But that was the day the Holy Spirit came upon the church. A huge crowd gathered around Peter as Peter preached and he said, "God has sent us the Holy Spirit."

And boom, the church was born. Honestly, Pentecost should be the third great holiday of the church next to Christmas and Easter, but most of the church treats it just like another Sunday. And that says a lot about the modern church when it comes to its attitude towards Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. I recall being invited to a birthday party in another church I serve for a kid in the church. They were a great family and it was an interesting scene. They had one of those blow up contraptions, jumpy contraptions, in the front yard and kids were jumping all over the place. They were running around. They had hired this clown to blow up funny balloons. There was cake, there was chaos, and during the whole time I

began to think of my own birthdays as a kid. Well, I forget, I was eating cake with a bunch of adults in the living room of that party, and I was sitting next to the birthday boy's uncle.

He didn't seem too excited to be there. He said something about the noise of the party and the party itself being too noisy. And then he said something I really will never forget. He said, "When you're a kid, birthdays are exciting. You look forward to those birthdays. You think about all the days ahead. But as you get a little older, well, there's less and less to get excited about. People keep telling you happy birthday when there's really nothing happy about it. All it does is tell you how old you are." Well, you know how preachers are. I can find sermon fodder anywhere. And I began to think, you know what? That's a living parable for how the church of Jesus Christ, most of the church, treats the Holy Spirit and the day of Pentecost. Most of the church sees the day of Pentecost as a noisy party from the past.

We understand it. It makes sense. We know it's a part of our history. But we'd just as soon eat our cake and then go home and take a nap. There may have been a time for all that wind and fire and Holy Spirit business and exuberance, but we're civilized Christians now and we have to be careful not to get too carried away. Some cynic has said that if it were up to most Christians, they would put lightning rods on their steeples instead of crosses as a way of remembering a time when lightning struck the church and as protection of it ever happening again. Many Christians, if we're honest, want just enough religion to be comfortable, just enough religion to feel good, but not so much religion that breaks up their routine or changes their way of life. Many Christians want the benefits of the Holy Spirit without really having to experience the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians want to go to the dance without actually having to dance. Well, so that's how we look at Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. We smile as we think about it and read about it and we go back to our lives as usual. After all, you have to be careful with all this Pentecost, Holy Spirit business. And if there's one thing we modern Christians are, it's careful. And you can't blame us really. I mean, lots of weird stuff goes on with Christians and churches who aren't as careful with this Holy Spirit business. I recall being in high school and being invited by a friend to his church that met in a warehouse. Never will forget it. And it was the first time I really heard praise and worship music, modern worship, and it wasn't bad. The music was great and people were singing and having a good time, when all of a sudden, this exuberant preacher gets up to preach and all the people around me started acting very strange.

There was a lady sitting next to me who started all this gibberish. They called it speaking in tongues. And then before long, a lady next to me on the other side started writhing and shaking. And soon all the people around me were on the floor writhing and shaking. And I looked to my friend and I said, "Do I need to call an ambulance?" And he said, "No, no, no. They're slain in the Spirit." I said, "Slain in the what?" He said, "The Spirit." I said, "Well, I have the Spirit too, but it never wanted to hurt me, and I've never acted that way before." You have to be careful with all this Holy Spirit, Pentecost business, don't you? I recall being at an administrative board meeting many years ago in another church I served and there was a youth that came to the meeting with all this material.

He had just gone to this conference on evangelism, learned all these different strategies and ways of evangelizing and reaching people for Jesus Christ. And he was excited to present this to the church as a way for us to do ministry. He even talked about reaching the community, going door to door, and he was all excited about it. When in the middle of his presentation, the chair of the board interrupted him and said, "Son, wait a second. We're we're excited about your excitement. We're excited that you went to this conference but we're not that kind of church. We don't bother people by going door to door. We don't do that." You have to be careful with all this Holy Spirit business, with this Pentecost business. A colleague of mine was assigned to his first church out of seminary, fresh out of seminary. Excited about it, excited about God's calling his life, about what God was calling him to do.

And so he went to this old church, but a lot of young people were moving into the area, and so he decided that he would start this new modern, edgier service to reach these young people. Well, he got a team of people together and they were excited about it too. They set a start date. People in the church who were musicians volunteered, folks donated media equipment, and everything was set. Well, there was a group in the church that didn't like this. That's not the way they did things. And so about a week before the service was about to start, when the pastor went to his office, he found in front of his office store a pile of stuff. That media equipment that had been donated, some instruments that had been donated. And there was a note on top of it that said, "Pastor, if you continue with this service, we're going to call the bishop and tell him that you're not fit to serve this church."

Well, he went ahead with the service, but about a year later, he was ousted out of that church. You really have to be careful with all this Holy Spirit, Pentecost business. And he didn't like the direction of the church the way it was going. People weren't praying enough, he thought, weren't reading the Bible enough, he thought, weren't serving people enough, he thought. And so he decided to take matters in his own hands and he started to gather with a small group of people that would meet regularly. And they would pray and they would read scripture and they would go out and serve other people. And it really caught on. People got excited about their faith, and in fact, this man went all around preaching to thousands of people, and many people came to Jesus Christ. But the church didn't like it, didn't like that group and didn't like him.

And so what did they do? They ousted him out of the church and told him he couldn't preach in the church anymore. But he said, "That's okay." He said, "The world is my parish." His name? John Wesley. The group? Methodist. You really have to be careful with all this Holy Spirit, Pentecost business, don't you? We've become real good at putting a governor on the Holy Spirit. We've become really good at stifling the Holy Spirit when it doesn't line up with our whims and fancies or really comes into our life to change things up. The Spirit is strong, and every Christian, every person who follows Christ, has it, but it's polite. It doesn't force itself on us. It will only go as far as we allow it. And thank goodness for that, right? Because, well, it's much easier running a church without being bothered by the Spirit, isn't it? All you have to do is be organized and be nice and find a nice speaker to tell nice stories. Have some good music, nice music, and you're well on your way to having your church.

Now, certainly you can't accomplish much for God, but at least you're in control. In 1983, Australia threatened to take the America's Cup from the United States. For years, the United States had gotten that coveted Cup of yacht racing, but this year, Australia mounted a serious challenge. And so they were each tied, one race each, and they had one race to go, and they got to the starting line, and all the crew was ready. The camera crew was ready. The crowd had gathered and everybody was ready. But there was no race. Why? There was no wind. And yachting, no wind means no race. It's true. Not much can happen without the Spirit, the wind. In the Bible, the Greek and Hebrew words for Spirit literally means wind. And Jesus said, "Well, the wind, you can hear it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it's going. It's a mystery." So it is with those who are born of the Spirit.

I recall a palm tree on a golf course I used to play. It was beautiful, but it was an obstruction on the fairway. We were always hitting into it. Then one day we were on that hole and we saw the palm tree had fallen to the ground. It wasn't an obstruction anymore. And I remember asking, "Oh, I wonder what caused that?" And one of my friends said to me, "Oh, it was the wind." I once knew a man who hated the church and hated faith, anything to do with it. And he said Christianity was for weak-minded people who couldn't stand on their own two feet. And then one day something changed. I don't know what happened. His heart was changed. He gave his life to Christ and started to go to church and he never missed a Sunday. And I remember thinking, "Well, what happened?" And someone said, "Oh, it was the

wind." And there I was, 16 years old, minding my own business, playing tennis a lot, getting crushes on girls.

And I was sitting in church with my family, with my parents and my two sisters, and we were passing the mints and playing Tic-Tac-Toe and writing notes about where we wanted to go to lunch after church. And all of a sudden, this man got up to preach. I couldn't believe what I heard. I had never heard anyone like him before. I was inspired, and before I knew it, I was shaking hands with him at the door after worship telling him I wanted to be a preacher. What? Me? A preacher? Are you kidding? What caused that? What happened? You know what? I think it was? The wind. Let's pray. Oh Lord, during this time, this season of waiting, during this time of transition, this time where we have, well, a lot of alone time to pray to you, to think about you, to reflect on our faith, may we be reinvigorated by the power of your Spirit. And afterwards, after all the dust settles, may we come back even stronger as a church and your Spirit. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.

We're going into a time of offering now. And as you might expect, because we're not meeting in person and worship, that means giving and offering needs to be done in different ways. And I need you to hear that it's important that you keep on giving. Just because we're not having worship in person, doesn't mean the bills stop coming, doesn't mean that the work of the church stops coming. We still need your financial support now more than ever. And so we encourage you right now or at some point to give online. We have a way for you to give online, and you can give that way just once for now or you can set up a payment plan that way. Or, you know what? Honestly, put your payment in your mailbox and one of us will come by and pick it up. Or simply continue to write checks and mail it to the church. But remember, we do need your financial support.