

Dear US Evangelical Church Pastor,

As we near the 2000th anniversary of Pentecost, it is evident the church has come a long way since its birth in Jerusalem. Much has changed as the gospel has traversed borders to reach the nations of the world. Moreover, advancements in technology, cultural and philosophical developments, social and political movements, all have contributed to make the world we live in a wholly different place than it was in the first century. Given the contemporary socio-cultural dynamics affecting how and where the church exists and ministers, we might wonder whether God might need to provide new directives or upgrades to the mission of the church in this brave new world. Thankfully, from its inception God birthed the church and continues to breathe new life on her through the Holy Spirit who descended on the Day of Pentecost.

It is my conviction many of our modern-day debates concerning the nature and mission of the church could be resolved if we simply acknowledged God sent His Spirit to guide the church at the local and global level. Currently in the US, as the Evangelical church grapples with the question of who their parishioners should vote for in the presidential elections, the question of ecclesial identity has become crucial. At a time when for reasons of political expediency Evangelicals are being told to vote for the Christian candidate, it is important to remember the Full Gospel still matters to the church.

As you continue to pastor the church where God has placed you, I ask you to consider this crucial question: when did the life of Jesus and life in the Spirit become less important for being and living as a Christian? These two signposts should still inform the life believers should live in society. It seems lately Evangelical Christianity has been defined more by doctrinal stances and less by the ethical demands of the Gospel and the desire to live by the Spirit. Knowing right doctrine has trumped right practice! But if the church is to have a significant impact in American culture and society in general, she needs to follow the way of Jesus and get back to Pentecost.

Remember, Jesus inaugurated his ministry declaring: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18 NRSV). Afterward, Jesus preached, taught, healed, and cast out demons in the power of the Spirit. But the mission of Jesus needs to be understood holistically including the emotional and social spheres as well as the primary spiritual spheres. As foreshadowed in his inaugural proclamation, Jesus’s ministry focused on announcing good news to the economically poor. Moreover, the gospel of Luke makes this clear when in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49) Jesus contrasted his blessings to the poor with woes against the rich. Perhaps, then, it would be wise to rethink Jesus’s mission in light of a more encompassing understanding of the gospel from a social justice perspective.

In addition, we need to reconsider the centrality of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the church with a renewed interest in political and cultural implications. While Acts chapter 2 has traditionally been pivotal in shaping charismatic beliefs with its focus on the Holy Spirit, it’s important to note that this event takes place midway through Luke’s larger two-part work of Luke-Acts. Thus, Pentecost should be seen as an outpouring of the Spirit that builds upon the initial outpourings of the Spirit in the gospel of Luke (1:41, 67; 2:25; 3:22; 4:18-19).

I often think how at times in our efforts to be contemporary and trendy church planters we forget the Spirit was quite innovative from the first day when the church was launched at Pentecost. With all the talk of rejuvenating, revitalizing, and reimagining the church, we forget that from day one the church was established with an intercultural, multilanguage ethos that empowered young and old, had no issues with egalitarian models of church ministry, and even

developed a multisite paradigm for planting international churches fully founded, organized, and led by Spirit-led laypersons who took the gospel they received back to their cities of origin.

Moreover, chapter two of Acts should be approached as a complete narrative, leading to an interpretation that combines the social aspects of Acts 2:42-47 with the initial outpouring of the Spirit at the start of the chapter. Consequently, the idealized portrayal of the early church becomes the standard model, outlining religious, cultural, and social principles the church should embody in the power of the Spirit. As a result, we should envision a church whose spiritual and pneumatological orientation is inherently linked to its involvement in societal liberating action: a genuine spirituality of liberation.

With all of this in mind, I greatly worry about the supposedly unpoliticized evangelical way of voting with the Bible in hand. In the past, the argument from the Religious Right had been that believers should vote with biblical concern, a focus on family values, and an elevated sense of issues of morality. However, the past two presidential elections have proven there is a great disregard for social justice. Despite real concerns of racism and misogyny oftentimes it takes evidence of moral issues for some Evangelical leaders and pastors to finally denounce political candidates. Question: why not denounce racism and side with the main causes of #blacklivesmatter? Why not condemn the despicable treatment of women of ALL colors on account of the value of women everywhere? Why not stand in solidarity with the immigrant community when they are vilified as murderers and rapists?

The 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections revealed the underlying sentiments of many Evangelical Christians; an anti-Black, anti-women, anti-immigrant attitude fueled by a supposed appeal to Scripture. “All Lives Matter” became the slogan of conservative evangelicals who have yet to recognize the systemic racism tainting their reading of Scripture, which blindly dismisses concern with social injustice. The spiritual bullying of women ministers who are biblically “put in their place,” (à la John MacArthur) by the continuation of patriarchal readings of 1 Timothy 2 is also the trademark of evangelical America. Moreover, the typical Evangelical Christian approaches the issue of immigration from a so-called biblical perspective of law and order, which continues to perceive 12 million Latinx people residing in the US as “illegals.” Sadly, I have to recognize that even some Latina/o believers have a hard time putting aside their political allegiance and develop a sharp biblical critique of the strange marriage between Evangelicalism and the Republican Party.

As the church, we cannot afford to be manipulated for political gain by any political organization or movement. As others have stated, we neither stand with the party of the elephant nor the donkey for we stand in full alliance with the Lamb. Thus, Scripture read in the power of the Spirit of Jubilee must offer necessary corrections to the political power structures that are vying for our allegiance. The ethical teachings of Jesus in the Gospels should refocus the church to train disciples who prioritize love for neighbor, comprehensive peace, and justice for the most vulnerable. Indeed, Christians should not easily succumb to manipulation by any political candidate. Instead, our faith should prompt us to ask probing questions of candidates and political platforms to make informed decisions about how to vote. Ultimately, our political choices should contribute to creating a more just future and world for all.

As a pastor and scholar, I feel a strong urge to approach our faith from a spiritual perspective that engages directly with issues of societal injustice. In addition, I strongly believe in the concept of the priesthood of all believers and pray we can approach this ecclesial guiding concept of ministry with a deeper sense of a personal connection to the Holy Spirit. Put succinctly, we must empower all believers to actively participate in the liberating mission of the

Holy Spirit. Just like the original recipients of the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost, today's Christian communities are often confronted with issues of marginalization, poverty, and oppression either directly or indirectly. As leaders, pastors, and scholars we must guide believers to embrace the full gospel of salvation, which includes physical, social, and spiritual liberation. Guided in the power of the Spirit of Jubilee, churches must embody evangelistic and ministerial practices that convey hope to overcome a broken world and strength to confront unjust social systems in the belief they can be transformed through the influence of the Spirit.

In closing, I pray that as you continue to pastor you will be mindful that like the prophets of Old Testament times, we cannot afford to remain quiet regarding issues affecting this country. Yes, spiritual and moral values matter, but social and economic injustices must factor just as heavily. After all, we are called to pastor communities and not just people in our church. Therefore, the gospel we preach must represent a message of holistic salvation for everyone who attends or listens.