

Living With Courage and Resilience
Part 7: Pentecost (Love)

by Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes

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NOTE: Due to an unusually heavy work load at the end of the week, I was not able to prepare a manuscript for this specific sermon. However, the central message of the sermon – 4G/5G faith - was originally developed for a guest sermon I preached at First Plymouth UCC in Lincoln, Nebraska, in January. What follows is a verbatim transcript of that sermon.

Jesus makes this outrageous promise to us in the gospel of John. He literally says that whatever we ask in His name, He'll do for us. I mean, do you buy that? I mean, I could tell you, I've asked for a lot of things, invoking the name of Jesus, and I have never gotten them.

If this worked, every sermon I preached, people would be moved to tears. Every book I wrote would be a New York Times bestseller. My wife would laugh at every joke I make. My kids would think I'm the coolest dad in the world, and I would have pulled up here in a cherry-red Ferrari. None of it happened. I can guarantee I can pray till the end of time, and none of that's going to happen either.

You see, it doesn't work that way. What Jesus meant by in my name doesn't mean invoke the name of Jesus. In ancient times, the name meant more than just your moniker. It had to do with your nature. It's something that signified what you were about in this world. When you pray in Jesus' name, it's about the way of life He's inviting us into. So, when you pray the things that Jesus Himself would pray for, He's saying, "You can expect help. You can expect a lot of help when you pray for the things that I would ask for according to my way of life."

So, what is Jesus' way of life that will bring us all this help? Well, happily, we don't have to guess too much. He tells us. There are plenty of hints in the gospel. For instance, when Jesus is asked, "What's the greatest commandment?" He says, "Actually there's two. The first is love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself."

In this statement, Jesus identifies three great loves that must come together: love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. We oftentimes forget that love of self. We think of self-love, but the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is love of self that is in

relation to love of God and neighbor at the same time. So, if you don't love yourself, please don't love me like you love yourself. Right?

The really important point about this is that those three great loves always have to come together if you're going to be following the way of Jesus or the way of Judaism. He says all of the law and the prophets, they're summed up in those two commandments, those three great loves. It doesn't work to say, "I'll love God and myself but not my neighbor," or, "I'll love God and my neighbor, not myself," or, "Love my neighbor and me but not God." Right?

They all three have to come together, otherwise the whole thing breaks down. It's kind of like when I moved to Omaha 10 years ago, I took the advantage ... I was going to get an iPhone. I was going to get an iPhone finally. I was so excited. I got one, and it sucked. It totally sucked. Now, the problem wasn't with the phone. I mean, in my hand was finally the most sophisticated piece of consumer cellular technology that the world had ever seen. But in order to get an iPhone at that time, I had to switch from Verizon to AT&T.

In Omaha, that meant going from a 3G cellular network to a 1G cellular network. What does that mean? With a 1G cellular network, your phone is always in relation to one cell tower. But with a 3G, your phone is always connected to three cell towers no matter where you go, so it picks up the strongest signal.

With my 1G network, I couldn't even make calls from my house. But finally, AT&T builds out their 3G networks. That was so good that we finally just cut our landline and said, "Forget it. We're just using cell now. This is awesome." That's the way Jesus is talking about. He turns life into 3G. Live life according to 3G, love of God, neighbor, and self together. That's when it gets good.

Now, some of you brainiacs out there know that, "Well, cellular technology isn't just 3G anymore. It's 4G." Right? The 4G is way over the top. What 4G does is it actually adds a layer of technology that allows so much data to stream into your phone that you can literally stream HG TV in 3-D on your cellphone. I mean, it just blows the mind what a 4G network and a cellphone can do these days.

Well, back to our story, back to the gospels, Jesus doesn't just leave us at 3Gs, the three great loves. He adds one more G to that network, and that is grace. Because we are never able to love God in a perfect way. We are never able to love our neighbor, as much as we say we do, in the way that is really, honestly perfect, or ourselves. We need grace. We need something that God supplies us that we can't come up with on our own.

It's not just about our moral or ethical failings. It's also about our wisdom and our intelligence and all that. I mean, we need God to imagine things that are greater than we can imagine and to be wiser than we are wise if you're going to bring all this together. If you got those 4Gs, now you have the way of life that Jesus is inviting us into.

Why is this important? Well, you heard that scripture, that second scripture this morning, where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes unto the Father except through me." If you ask the majority of Christians, what they'll say is, "That means if you are not Christian, you ain't getting into heaven. It's Jesus' way or the hell way." Right?

The problem with that, besides the fact that's absolutely not the way Jesus meant it, is because in today's world when we have democratized the instruments of mass destruction, and we have weaponized politics, I'll tell you, it's a whole lot easier to bomb people you feel have no relation to the true God. It's a whole lot easier to disrespect, not even listen to people who you think are going to hell rather than heaven. Right?

What He means in His statement, "I am the way, the truth, and life," is He's inviting us into the way of life of Jesus. In other words, if you're not loving God, yourself, and your neighbor together and embracing God's grace, letting God do for you what you can't, there is no connection. The way you connect with God is through 4G, the three great loves and grace.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I look to the Jewish path, I see those three great loves. When you start to understand the grace that Jesus is talking about, you realize that throughout the Hebrew scriptures and faith, that grace is a through piece. That grace He wasn't just inventing anew. He was drawing on the very beginnings of faith and humanity.

When I turn to Islam, I see a religion that is steeped in love of God, neighbor, and self, and again, grace. Now all of us, of course, in any of these faiths, when we're acting at our worst, you don't see grace. You don't see love of God. You don't see love of neighbor. You don't see a love of self. It's when we're at our best, you see all those things.

Isn't it interesting that in the day and age where humanity is at the greatest risk that it's ever been in with respect to worldwide violence, that the spirit of the living God is raising up people all over the world to meet that challenge with some of the most sophisticated ways of making peace ever established in the history of our human species.

Just one of many examples of that is the way that the spirit of God is calling people of faith, all kinds of faiths, together to discover, oftentimes for the first time since the founding of their faith, that there actually is a connection between ourselves and our God together. Jesus says this, by the way. If we just reverse back to that chapter 10, He says so much. He says, "You know, I have other flocks that are not of this fold. They know my voice. They hear in 4G already, so they come when I call."

That's exactly what we're finding in Omaha, Nebraska. I strongly suspect that's what you're already finding here in Lincoln. But the way that we're working that out in Omaha is we are recognizing that in Judaism, there are all kinds of Jews and all kinds of Muslims who are relating to God in 4G. And so are we. What we're doing is we've built a 37-acre campus together, locating the three faiths, the three Abrahamic faiths together, who have such a history of conflict. All the 4G faiths together.

You know what's already starting to hit us is that this thing is way bigger even than 4G. We suspect that when you actually relate to other people of these other faiths that are worshiping the same God, you start to hear their experience of God, which is so similar to you, but also a little bit different. You start learning more about this God that you say you love so much.

What we're finding at Countryside is the average Countrysider has become 20% more Christian as a result of being in the Tri-Faith Initiative. Same thing with Temple Israel, 20% more Jewish. Same thing with the AMI, 20% more Muslim. Worshiping the same God. We suspect that God is already in the process of developing a 5G network. I have no idea really what that looks like, but I do know what the G stands for. That is great awakening, an awakening that is so great that it will surpass all of the great awakenings in American history.

And not just in American history. It will surpass the great awakening of The Reformation. In fact, it is a great awakening that is so great, this is not a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity nor even a once-in-a-millennium opportunity. This coming together constitutes possibilities that God is creating that have literally not existed since the foundation of all three faiths.

I know that you are already resonating with that because I know Jim Keck, and you love Jim Keck. I love Jim Keck, and I know Jim is so excited about what's happening. You can't help but be tapped into this already, and that's one of the signs that a great awakening is truly great. It's not just centered in one community doing all these wonderful things. It's actually spread out clear across the human structure so that one thing may rise up, but it triggers other things to rise up.

That's when you get a truly great awakening that God is building for us. You are already feeling those resonances, I'm sure. The only question in today's age that I have for you this morning is recognizing that God is building out a new network of people of many faiths. 5G. God is already speaking to you, calling you in 5G. The only question is will you pick up the phone? Amen.