

**Tusculum Hills Baptist Church**  
**Paul Gunn, Pastor**

**Unity**

**Acts 1:12-26**

**August 4, 2013**

The three points of this sermon:

- When you experience the risen Christ, you will be unified in purpose.
- When you experience the risen Christ, you will set aside your personal agenda.
- When you experience the risen Christ you will approach the future with confidence.

**INTRODUCTION**

I want to tell you a little bit about myself. I don't normally do this when I preach, but it does go with the sermon, because I know church. I'm a chaplain in the Air Force right now. I'm on a four-year tour to recruit chaplains for the Air Force Reserves. So, I talk to pastors and seminary students almost every day, telling them about the opportunities in the Air Force Reserve and how they can help us. Due to lack of funds, my job comes to an end in a few months, but I sure have enjoyed, and still do enjoy, putting on the uniform every day and wearing the cross in the workplace.

I am a Tennessee boy. I was born right here in Nashville. I grew up in a pastor's home. My dad pastored churches in Dotsonville. I also lived in Westmoreland and Gallatin. My dad's last pastorate was in McMinnville. I've lived in Tennessee most of my life. I spent less than 10 years in Texas and Kentucky.

In the first grade, I felt a call to ministry. Our first-grade teacher asked people, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I remember, as she went down the aisle asking each student, one said, "I want to be a fireman." One said, "I want to be an astronaut," which was real popular back then when we had the money for those things, and others said, "I want to be a doctor. I want to be a teacher, a nurse." She got to me, and I said, "I want to be a preacher," and with that she dismissed the class, and everybody went home.

My dad was called to ministry a couple of years later. So, I always joked that the Lord called me before him. Growing up in a pastor's home—what an experience! I wouldn't trade it for anything. I've lived a large portion of my life in church. I was used to getting to church early and leaving late. I've had many meals in church. I've played there. I've slept in church. One time I was preaching, and this little boy on the front row fell asleep, and I said, “Ma'am, wake up your son,” and she said, “You wake him up; you're the one who put him to sleep.”

As a child I had many experiences in the church. In the winter of '77 the pipes froze in the parsonage and were frozen for weeks. That was a dreadful winter in Westmoreland, and we were we were without water. We had to haul water; so, my dad took us to the church, filled up the baptistry and said, “Kids, one at a time, take a bath.” So, I know church. I know church in ways some of you don't.

I've served on four church staffs. I've probably heard over 5,000 sermons, and I've preached many myself. I know church well. I know the good; I know the bad and the ugly. I have more reasons not to attend church than anybody, but I am still here. Do you know why? Because I believe in the ministry and mission and commission of the church. I believe that the church is the only hope for this country. We sure don't have hope anywhere else. The only hope is the church that teaches and preaches Jesus Christ. I know what the church is capable of doing.

Now, I understand that Tusculum Hills is going through some changes. I hope that in today's message your thinking will be challenged both on a personal and on a church-wide level. I want you to know that I've considered and I've prayed over the words that I'm going to share with you today. I've not preached this message before. I've never used this text before. This is fresh for me, and I hope it will be fresh for you.

## **SCRIPTURE** Acts 1:12-26

*<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer,*

along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)<sup>16</sup> and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.<sup>17</sup> He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”<sup>18</sup> (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.<sup>19</sup> Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)<sup>20</sup> “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms: “‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership.’<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us,<sup>22</sup> beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”<sup>23</sup> So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.<sup>24</sup> Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen<sup>25</sup> to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.”<sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

## **EXPLANATION**

### **1-WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE THE RISEN CHRIST, YOU WILL BE UNIFIED IN PURPOSE.**

The disciples had just been through the experience with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection. They weren't there most of the time. They ran and hid, but they had just spent several years with Jesus as they followed him around. He trained them as a rabbi would train students, because he knew that one day he would be gone, and they would be the torchbearers.

After the resurrection, the disciples were called apostles. If you've studied these 12 men, now eleven men, you will know that these were men who did not agree very often. Yet, here they were in one accord, and they made a choice to choose one to replace Judas. In today's world we think “win-win.” So, we would just choose both

people, but they didn't do that. They said, “The scripture says we need to choose someone to take this man's place in leadership.” So, the lot fell to Mathias. He met the criteria; he was a witness to the resurrection and the resurrected Christ, and they went forward.

Now, my first point I want you to hear from today's message is this. When you experience the risen Christ, you will be unified in purpose. These disciples had a major job to do. This job was to tell the world about Jesus. Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told those watching to go into all the world and to be witnesses even to the ends of the earth. That had taken place. They were unified in purpose. They made a choice and didn't think twice about it. They didn't argue about it. They were told to go reach the world, to tell the gospel to the world.

## **APPLICATION**

The population of the world at this time is estimated to have been around a hundred and fifty million people. So, this handful of people, these apostles and the other believers, had been given this task. That's less than half of the population of the United States. The estimated population of the world today is over 7.1 billion, with an estimated population of 8 billion by the year 2025. After 2025 sounds like a long way from now, but it's not. Twelve years from now, the world's population will cross 8 billion. Well, how many Christians do we have in the world? How are we doing?

In the broadest estimate of the word “Christian,” where someone claims to be a Christian, there's an estimated two billion people. So, a handful of people in Jesus's day were commanded to take the message to 150 billion, and today we are challenged to take the same message to over 7 billion people.

So, I have to ask the question. Are we unified in the purpose of doing that? How are we doing? There are different studies; there are conflicting results about how we are doing. The question is not, “How is everyone else doing with this Great Commission” The question is, “How is Tusculum Hills doing? Are you reaching this area for Christ?”

As I drove here this morning, I saw signs in, I think, at least 8 different languages, which reflect a very diverse community. Now, it would be so easy for us to sit here

and let our minds wander back to yester-year when all the community had one language, when everyone looked similar. Yesteryear is gone, and yesteryear is not coming back, and Ecclesiastes 7:10 talks about pining for yesteryear when yesteryear wasn't really as good as we think it was, but what an opportunity.

Think about this. What's happening in this area is not happening all over Nashville. It's not happening all over Tennessee. Do you understand what God is doing? God is bringing the world to your front door, right here. What a mission field. What an opportunity. You're in the best possible location for ministry. What will you do with it?

Last week Dr. Allen told me he spoke about not holding back, and I think what a timely message. I don't know what God has in store for the future of Tusculum Hills; however, if you have a unified purpose, and you have experienced the risen Christ, you will work to guard the unity of the church, and God will bless the people who are devoted to him. If you are a people who have experienced the risen Lord, and it's fresh in your hearts and minds, you will be a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

I heard about a church that was divided. They needed a new chandelier. The sockets weren't working; the fixtures were obsolete to fix the chandelier. So, the pastor went on a hunt to look for chandeliers, and he found one. He came back to the church business meeting, and he proposed a new chandelier. Well, an argument broke out in the church, and there was some for the chandelier, and there was some against the chandelier. They listed the pros and the cons, and finally one man stood up, and he said, "I think I can speak for the people who do not want the chandelier. Buying a new chandelier, pastor, may sound like a good idea to you, but I'm against it for three reasons: First of all, it's too expensive, and we can't afford it. Second, there isn't anybody here who knows how to play it, and third, what we really need is a new light fixture."

A unified church can do anything, but a divided church cannot do anything.

## **EXPLANATION**

## **2-WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE THE RISEN CHRIST, YOU WILL SET ASIDE YOUR PERSONAL AGENDA.**

Listen to what the scripture says in Luke chapter 9. Let's go back before Acts chapter 1 had taken place. Let's go back before the resurrection had taken place.

**SCRIPTURE** Luke 9:46-48

*<sup>46</sup> An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. <sup>47</sup> Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. <sup>48</sup> Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.*

Then again, at the Last Supper, they quarreled about who was the greatest, but no longer in Acts chapter 1 and through the rest of the scripture. They didn't quarrel among each other in the way that they had before because now they had experienced the risen Christ, and their personal agendas no longer mattered.

### **ILLUSTRATION**

Let me illustrate. I served at a church where we had a particular man who was generous and kind, but he was critical of everything. I mean he was a flaw-finding machine. He would find flaws where there weren't even flaws. He would send these long, drawn-out emails to the church staff about everything that was wrong with the church, page after page. It was painful. He would list all the things that he was unhappy about. I believe that we should listen when people have things to say, but this man wouldn't stop, and I realized that he would never be happy, no matter what. We allowed him to come and talk to us. We did our best to address his concerns, but he kept bringing up the same things over and over.

One day I heard a speaker at a Christian seminar who challenged me. He said, "Spend time with joyful Christians, and don't let naysayers pull you down. Be aware of them; know who they are, but don't let them pull you down." So, it hit me how much time I had given this particular man, time I could never get back time, that I could have spent with others. I shared my thoughts with the staff, and we compiled all his complaints, and as a staff we wrote him a unified response to all

his complaints. It took two weeks for the staff to be unified in our response to him, and then we all signed it, and we gave it to him. Regarding the things he complained about over and over, we gave definite answers, and we told him we never wanted to revisit these things again. I felt like a free man, and I moved on to others who deserved my time and attention.

## **APPLICATION**

Let's go back to the apostles. The Bible says that they were in one accord. They were no longer worried about personal agendas. Why? Because they had experienced the risen Christ. Life is too short to spend your days trying to enforce personal agenda. Be a good representative of the risen Christ.

### **3-WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE THE RISEN CHRIST, YOU WILL APPROACH THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE.**

#### **SCRIPTURE** Acts 2:1-11

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

*<sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. <sup>7</sup> Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"*

## **EXPLANATION**

When you experience the risen Christ and are given a Great Commission, you will be filled with confidence. The disciples weren't wondering about what this was that came upon them. They knew; they had confidence, and they spoke, and people heard in their own language. It was amazing because these are the men who had trouble getting along. Now they were moving forward with unified confidence because they had a job to do.

Let me review who these men were. Thomas wasn't doubting as he did before. Peter wasn't denying Christ as he did before. They were not sleeping when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They were not arguing about the meaning of the parables. They were not arguing over who was the greatest. They were not pushing little children away. They weren't fearful as they had been on the boat in the storm, even though Jesus was with them. None of them were betraying Jesus at that time. No one was hiding like they did during the crucifixion. None of them wanted to go back to fishing as they did one time before. They had a mission on their mind, and they were confident because the Holy Spirit had filled them and given them the confidence that they needed.

What the world needs to see today is a church of unified believers. I work for the government, but the world will never find answers in the government. The only hope is through the church. That's it.

It's easy to become fearful if you don't have a risen Lord. The book of Revelation tells us that in the end, we win. So, the church needs to be the church, as the song says. Unified, we can do anything; divided we can do nothing.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

I heard about a church in Illinois that had a few mechanics who just wanted to give their gifts, their skills to fix cars, to others. So, the church unified and built an auto garage, and people donate cars to the church. These mechanics fix up the cars, and they give the cars to people who are trying to get on their feet. They do that because the church is unified behind that purpose.

Last month a friend of mine told me he just celebrated his 15th anniversary as youth pastor at the same church, and he said, "Never, during my entire tenure, did I

wonder where the church was going, because the church is unified behind its pastor. They follow the leader.”

Now, how does the church experience unity? By experiencing the risen Christ, not just Jesus the Savior, but the risen Christ. That's what Christ means. So, we have Jesus, Savior, Christ, risen Lord Jesus Christ. If there's anything wrong with the church today, it's what I would call the reversal of the Great Commission. Instead of going to tell, we've created our own “coming here now” ministry.

## **APPLICATION**

Your ministry begins when you leave this parking lot. Today, your worship experience should be A refresher so that when you leave, you are ready to share Christ with others, and you are ready to make it through this week as a believer, a joyous Christian who has a risen Lord.

A body of unified believers are those who have confessed their sins. They have made amends with each other. They've set aside their own personal agendas, and they have a fresh experience with the risen Lord. This is what the early church was like, and the early church grew like crazy.

I read in a history book some of the reasons the early church grew like they did. One was the intolerance of the church. Wow! What a what a word that we don't use today. We want to be tolerant, but the early church was intolerant of idolatry and false doctrine, and that attracted people who wanted a solid foundation.

Next was their belief in the afterlife. This had never been taught before; they had experienced the resurrected body of Christ, and now they had hope beyond the grave to share with other people.

Next, the supernatural gifts of the early church. People got healed. How I would love to see some people healed today. Also, their godly virtues; they made it real clear what they believed was right and what they believed was wrong. They had high moral living, and this caused the church to grow, and the last thing that this one particular author wrote was that the unity and discipline of the church was a factor in why the early church grew like it did.

What about you as an individual? Have you experienced the risen Christ? Do you need to go back to that time where you trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior and be refreshed and remind yourself that you do indeed serve a risen Lord, not a dead King, but a risen Lord? You don't serve anyone else but a risen Lord; he is your Savior. Do you live day to day completely defeated? Hopefully not, but if so, it's time for you to experience this risen Christ. Every time there's a crowd, there's always at least one person, several people, present who are skeptical of all this. They're skeptical of preaching; they're skeptical of becoming a Christian. They just don't know. Here's my question to those of you, “Without Christ, is it working for you?” Probably not.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
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