

Pastors Speak Out on Protests Over Pentecost Weekend

On Pentecost Sunday, protests sparked by the death of George Floyd and a larger trend of police brutality against African Americans continued to spread to cities across America. Some of these protests remained peaceful, while others turned into riots and violent conflicts between police officers and protestors. Many cities enacted curfews in response, and National Guard troops were deployed to several states.

During this time of tremendous unrest, pastors directly addressed current events from the pulpit and shared the timely message of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit and the biblical need for justice.

Rich Villodas, lead pastor at New Life Fellowship Church in New York City, reflected on the symbolic significance of fires burning across the nation on Pentecost Sunday in his morning sermon.

"I find it to be symbolically relevant that on this Pentecost Sunday, parts of our country are up in flames," Villodas said during a livestream. "... Our country is up in flames, flames of rage, flames of pain, flames burning for justice. It's symbolically relevant because Pentecost is also a day when we remember the flames, but of a different kind. I'm talking about the flames of the Holy Spirit resting on the heads of Jesus' disciples. This is what I want us to see. The flames of the Spirit are given so that we can extinguish the flames of injustice.

"There's a saying that says you can't fight fire with fire. While that may be true in a physical sense, it's not true on a spiritual level. Because the fire that God sends is for the purpose of making things right, to extinguish the fires of

injustice in our world. It's time that we see Pentecost for what it truly is. Pentecost is not a day to recreate something that happened 2,000 years ago or to manipulate people into a state of spiritual frenzy and spiritual ecstasy. Pentecost is not a powerful emotional and spiritual that simply just enables to speak in other languages and roll on the floor. Pentecost is, yes, about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gift from God, but it's given to empower us to cross barriers that are often too thick to break down on our own. ... Pentecost is our annual reminder that God has given the church the Holy Spirit not to satisfy our private, insatiable lust for more experiences but to mark us to be witnesses of Jesus' kingdom, a kingdom marked by love and justice and forgiveness and reconciliation."

Rev. William J. Barber II, a pastor and co-leader of the Poor People Campaign, gave "a pastoral letter to America" in which he asked the American church to exercise discernment this Pentecost, according to the Religion News Service.

"We cannot try to hurry up and put the screams and the tears and the hurt back in the bottle, just to get back to some normal that was abnormal in the first place," Barber said. "Hear the screams. Feel the tears. The very people rejected over and over again are the ones who have shown us the possibility of a more perfect nation. They are telling us these wounds are too much. This death is too much. If we listen to America, if we listen, and now is the time for us not to stop mourning, but to mourn and refuse to be comforted, to unite our collective moral power and demand transformative change right now."

Author and theologian Rev. Dr. Esau McCaulley shared a transcript of his Pentecost sermon, in which he discussed the need for a unified, Spirit-led church that puts its hope in the gospel of the kingdom.

"Some might wonder what riots and a black man dying at the

hand of the police have to do with Pentecost and the actual passage in Acts 2:1-21," McCaulley said. "Don't we understand, brothers and sisters, this is the question! Does the gospel, the death and resurrection of the Messiah for our sins, have anything to do with how approach the flames of Minneapolis? Does the church have something to say or will we be disciplined by Fox News on the one hand and MSNBC on the other? Cities are burning and a country is divided, what do the words of the gospel mean in this context. There is no other world to talk about Jesus than a world in which black men have their necks steps on for nine minutes."

Pastor Eugene Cho tweeted, "On this Pentecost Sunday, we confess our need for God. We need the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Lord, give us ears to hear. Give us hearts that break. Please heal our land. Convict our hearts. Open our eyes. Stir us to repentance and forgiveness. In Jesus' name. Amen."

And in a sermon shared thousands of times on Twitter, Rev. Dr. Charlie Dates, pastor at Progressive Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois, said the power of the Holy Spirit was necessary to change our broken world.

"Pentecost keeps us from an old future. Can't you tell? Can't you feel it in the air? We in America are headed for an old future. We've seen this video before. We've heard these laments and these cries before, except this time it's in high definition on an iPhone. But here is what you need my young sister ... [and] young brother, as you take to the streets and as you tweet and as you profile others on Instagram, you need the power of the Holy Ghost. Because when the power comes, in Acts 2, it's the power to be an effective witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the power to say that what human systems fail to do, God in his infinite power and wisdom can do.

"It's the power that says Jesus put a Caesar to flight. He scared the Roman Empire. He shook the Jerusalem religious

system. And they laid Him to down to death, but He rose early on a Sunday morning. It's a new power, but it takes power to be able to proclaim that message, and you can't do this power with your intellectual strength. You cannot have this power with mere anger and emotion. You need Holy Ghost power. You need the power of God to be a witness in the world."