

Don't Ignore This Key to Spiritual Awakening

This past Sunday night, a small miracle occurred in my hometown of LaGrange, Georgia. Christians from dozens of different denominations and ethnic backgrounds gathered at First Baptist Church—the biggest church in town—to thank God for His goodness and to intentionally shatter divisions.

Cade Farris, the pastor of First Baptist, was beaming from ear to ear when he welcomed the people as they streamed into the auditorium. Yet Farris didn't preach. He gave his pulpit to two African-American ministers from the city, along with pastors from Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist backgrounds.

The five preachers were given only seven minutes each to speak on the subject of thanksgiving, from Psalm 100. But when pastor Lamar Hardwick of the nondenominational New Community Church preached, he shared some of his time with the audience. "I'm giving up some of my time because I want y'all to praise God!" Hardwick said, inviting people to stand for an undignified celebration.

People all over the building clapped and shouted praises, lifting their hands in the air. In that moment, this didn't feel like my grandmother's Baptist church. But nobody complained.

I've been in many worship services with talented music teams. But there was something special about this night. Five different teams led us in praise—including a group from a local Spanish congregation, another from a Pentecostal church, and a multi-racial band led by a young African-American woman.

With every song, it felt as if Jericho's walls were falling. At one point, the atmosphere was so thick with God's presence that people had to sit down. That was right before Pastor Cade

called four people to the podium to read Psalm 100 in languages spoken by immigrants in our community—Korean, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish.

LaGrange, which is about 45 minutes southwest of Atlanta, is a quiet, working-class community of 30,000. Most churches are still segregated, even though the population is almost equally black and white, with an added Korean minority due to the nearby Kia plant.

Nobody had to address the elephant in the room. We know LaGrange is divided. But Brazilian youth pastor Nelson Furtado stated the obvious before reading Psalm 100 in Portuguese. “We are one family,” he said. “This is what heaven looks like.”

I had a profound experience at the closing of the service, when everyone in the auditorium joined hands across the aisles to pray. I heard in my spirit the creaking of a huge old door. I sensed the Lord saying to me: “I am opening the door of Pentecost to this city.”

I don’t believe this promise is just for my small town, either. In this season of intense political division, the Lord is calling His people to a new level of connection.

I’m not talking about a contrived show of unity where we just smile at each other once a year and go home. What we need is authentic togetherness combined with heartfelt repentance for our divisions. God wants the church to get serious about tearing down the walls of race, denominationalism and politics.

The Bible tells us the secret of Pentecost. Before the wind of the Holy Spirit rushed into the Upper Room, an otherworldly unity knit the hearts of the early disciples. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1, KJV).

The phrase “in one accord” comes from the Greek word

homothymadon, which literally refers to musical harmony. The Spirit manifests His power when God's people play the same song the conductor is playing! He does not want us simply in unity with each other; true unity is only possible when we are on the same page with Him.

Do we want another Pentecost? We must come together. We must worship together. We must put aside the hurts of the past, the awkward racial tensions and the bitter divisions between Republicans and Democrats. It is time to dismantle what separates us.

This also means pastors must stop building their small fiefdoms and recognize that God's vast kingdom includes all born-again believers. There is only one true church. Ephesians 4:4 says: "There is one body and one Spirit, even as you were called in one hope of your calling."

We are one. We must start acting like it, or we will miss the moment of our visitation.