

April 19, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

Our passage follows Pentecost, where *“they” were all together in one place*, when suddenly a sound from heaven, like the rush of violent wind, shook the place and something like tongues of fire rested on each person, *“all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit”* and began to speak in other languages: *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Pontus, Asian, Phrygians and Pamphylans, Egyptians, Libyans, Romans, Jews, Gentiles, Cretanians and Arabs.*

*“All of them. All of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit”*. The organizing miracle of the post-Ascension Church is God’s Spirit being poured out on and filling all people. When the festival crowd heard the mighty wind and heard people preaching in every language under heaven they asked, *“What does this mean?”* Peter preached *“this is what the prophet Joel spoke of: “how God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young shall see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. I will pour out the Holy Spirit on enslaved people and they will prophesy.”* Pentecost affirms “all means all”: females preaching, old men dreaming, young people leading, enslaved persons prophesying, God’s Spirit filling people from every nation under heaven.

*“Parthians, Medes, Elamites...”* There is no one Christian nation. There is no singular sanctified cultural blueprint. There is no such thing as Christian Nationalism. Every knee, every prince, every principality, every president, every power, every culture, every nation, every system falls under the grace and the judgment of the Lord. (Romans 14, Philippians 2, Matthew 25). God does force us into one homogeneous Christian mold. The Creator created and loves human diversity. What creator enjoys making the same image 77 billion times? Paul tells us that *“God, who created all things” wants to make known the wisdom of God in its rich variety through the church.*” (Ephesians 3) The church should be a spiritual innovation lab: applying Christ’s teachings to our diverse contexts. !

The Acts of the Apostle never describes God calling the disciples up on a mountain to hand out a packet of creeds, blueprints, and model constitution. No angel band gave us an order of worship, a list of approved Bible books, or a pathway to ordination. We gather and glean our constitutions and creeds from the Actions of the Apostles and letters to churches trying to figure out how to follow Jesus in Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus. Led by the Spirit Philip breaks the taboos and preaches in Samaria and baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch. (Acts 8) Filled with the Spirit Peter eats unkosher food and baptizes a Roman Centurion. A big denominational fight happens after that. (Acts

10-15). It is more nuanced than these blunt verses but Hebrews 8 calls the law “*obsolete*” and Paul declares that “*in Christ nothing is unclean*” (Romans 14). Friends, although churches often anchor themselves in rules, perhaps the most important theological insight for any church is “*you will receive the Holy Spirit!*” The winds of the Spirit always push us to lean out a little more.

Now, each of us and every church needs some organizing theology, Acts 2 offers at least 12 tethers or holds for a healthy church.

1. Baptism into Jesus name
2. Repentance or realigning our lives through Jesus teachings
3. The assurance of forgiveness
4. The promise that God’s Spirit is poured out on all peoples
5. Female preaching
6. Devotion to spirited wrestling with the Scriptures
7. A radical commitment to each other both spiritually and economically
8. Breaking bread sacramentally and with glad and generous hearts in homes
9. Prayer
10. Signs and wonders. Like these signs we have today
11. The Goodwill of neighbors
12. Prophetic preaching- “*save yourself from this corrupt*” culture that crucified Jesus- say their names: from Abel to Zechariah, from Jesus to George Floyd. (Matthew 23)

In a meeting this week, Jerry Park shared that he came to Belmont because Belmont takes the Bible seriously enough to wrestle with it, to ask questions, to share doubts, to subject it to scrutiny, scholarship and our lived experiences. Belmont offers a safe harbor to not only deconstruct harmful theologies but to construct a winsome faith. We leave room for the Holy Spirit, mystery, reason, tradition, experiences, and innovation. Belmont believes: “*you will receive the Holy Spirit*”

Our mission statement speaks to Belmont’s openness to God’s leading inside us inside and beyond these walls. We declare “*Belmont United Methodist Church is a community of Christ-followers growing in love of God and neighbor...!*” Does that remind you of those first Christian communities, who were open to growing in love as they sought to apply Jesus’ teaching to their common life? *Belmont United Methodist Church is a community of Christ-followers growing in love of God and neighbor... We believe every person is of sacred worth and created in God’s image. We commit to Jesus’ example of inclusive love, care, and intentional hospitality with (all people)... . We respect our*

*diversity of opinion and expressions of faith. Therefore, as God loves us, so let us love and serve in the name of Christ. (As a church nestled between two colleges we are a little wordy so I edited that down a touch.)*

We have sometimes fearfully lowered our sails and clung to the mast, afraid that some fierce cultural storm might sink us. But we have often leaned out in faith catching the winds of the Holy Spirit. 75 years ago Belmont Weekday School began one of the first church related pre-schools in Tennessee. We have held ESL classes for almost 50 years. Tennessee Justice for our Neighbors began in a spare room off the Choir Room.

Today is ministry Sunday where we consider the impact Belmont has had on us, on neighbors and on our world. We have these 50 signs and a booklet of 50 different kinds of ministry here at Belmont. Take it home and think about how you might connect and serve. If you look at these signs and wonder, why are they not doing something this or that perhaps the Spirit is ppl stirring you to help lead us into something new? Bishop Joe Pennell once described Belmont as a congregation facing the other direction. Rev. John Collett talked about our ethos of Openness. We are a spiritual innovation lab.

This is ministry Sunday, where we ask “What is the impact of Belmont's ministry on our lives?”

In my office, I have this little translation device from General Conference 2020 that occurred in 2024 due to the pandemic. This little radio allowed for the 862 delegates from all over the world to simultaneously hear translations in English, French, Portuguese and Swahili. In 2028, we will add Spanish! The special General Conference of 2019 ended in disaster when a narrow majority doubled down on exclusionary harmful Disciplinary language around human sexuality. The next Sunday our bishop worshiped with us at Belmont. A few Sundays later, we welcomed United Methodists to a Sunday night “Service of Lament”, pastors and lay people from as far as Knoxville, Memphis, Bowling Green, and Paducah came together in grief and resolve. I suppose we could've walked away from our denominational connections- Malawi, Samoa, the Mamma Lynn Center, or Community Care Fellowship. Instead of dropping out we leaned in with the Good News that all people are of sacred worth. We wiped the tears of lament from each other's eyes and rolled up our sleeves and got to work.

By June of 2019, when the Tennessee conference elected new delegates to the General and Jurisdictional Conference, seven people with deep Belmont roots and connections joined the 16 person Tennessee delegation: Rev. Jefferson Furtado, Linda Furtado, Jacob Vaughn, Rev. Marie King, John Pearce, Rachel Hagewood and myself. Belmont has always sent people to serve beyond our walls: Dot and Bill Anderson,

Jefferson and Linda, Chris Allen, Adam Kelcher, Darren MayBerry Wright, David McIntere, Susan Gray, John Collett to Superintendency, Joe Pennell in time to the episcopacy, and many other faith leaders.

In 2020, Belmont hosted the Reconciling Ministries national conference. I hope to never forget Bishop Karen Olivetto dancing down our center aisle singing Taylor Swift's "Shake it off". On April 30, 2024 John, Marie, Jefferson, Rachel and I had the holy privilege of voting with super majorities of 76% and 93% and shaking off the harmful language that excluded queer people from ordination and church weddings. During the morning recess delegates broke into song singing "Make the Circle Wider" I just stood there weeping. That moment was so holy I do not feel the need to vote at a General Conference again.

In those difficult days Belmont applied Jesus's teaching with open hearts, open minds and open doors. We were salt, light, and leaven shining welcome and love into our world. We helped a worldwide church catch up with the Holy Spirit. We remembered the Easter promise, "Christ is Risen and going ahead of us, you will see God in Midtown, Memphis and Malawi. (Matthew 28) We remember the Pentecost promise: *"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit Comes upon you". (Acts 1-2)*

Nashville will always need us leaning out into the winds of change, yes, tethered to Scripture, but knowing the Word of God is living and active, and poured into all people. May it always be so in us. Amen.