

August 18th – Celebrate A Good Home – Feast of Weeks (Pentecost/Church/Presence)

Introduction – My heart was disturbed by a news story I saw last week about how young girls are being targeted online by predators through picture apps. Pedophiles use Instagram, Snapchat and other apps to communicate secretly with children to lure them into meetings with promises of fame or relationship. Just last week a pedophile was caught because parents, suspicious about communications they found on their 10-year-old daughter's phone, alerted police to an arranged meeting between their daughter and man in his 20's from Kentucky. This little girl was from a small town near us. Then Elizabeth and I were watching Mark Levin interview Jaco Booyens who released a movie (8 Days) about the growing problem of Sex Trafficking in America. He described how young girls and boys are being kidnapped and sold into slavery by predators who use different techniques to create disconnection and distance between parent and child and then exploit that for profit. He described it as a crisis which is never talked about in our country...But then along came a guy named Epstein whose suicide has conspiracy theorist speculating that wealthy and powerful people in this country needed him dead instead of spilling the beans on those who took advantage of the young girls he provided. Could this all lead to finally exposing this real threat?

There has always been evil lurking around our children, but because of the access (which we have talked about in detail through the illustration of Sydnee) that evil and godless people have to our children now through the internet, our circumstances have become "dire." The problem our children face is the same as our parents warned us. We would tell our kids; we can't go with you everywhere, but our words and instructions can...let them keep you safe.

Today we will talk about God's authenticity expressed in His presence as we consider the birth of the church during the Pentecost celebrated after the resurrection of Jesus. It was no coincidence that this took place during the Feast of the Pentecost because God would connect the giving of the Holy Law at Sinai with the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It was His way of perfecting His Presence in us to protect us from all the evil that lurks in the world around us. His intent was to more fully write His words on our heart so that we could always say no to sin and yes to righteousness. God's presence in us is through the gifting of the Holy Spirit as explained and demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to His disciples that He would not leave them alone even though bodily He would be gone. He was giving them a great gift:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." (Joh 14:16-21)

For 3500 years, God has secured His people by mandating the regular celebration of the harvest as a demonstration of His eternal presence. The Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost (7 weeks plus 1 day) celebrated the harvest and the first fruits by also celebrating the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai to Moses for the first 1500 years. The Law was always God's way of being ever present in the lives of His people. King Solomon described it this way in Proverbs 3:1-10

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. (Proverbs 3:1-10)

Since that day of Pentecost described in Acts 2 some 2000 years ago God secures us by mandating our regular meeting together so that we can encourage one another in the Spirit. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:23-25) The very purpose of the church is to keep God's people in touch with His Power and His Presence and His Promise. The Church is specifically the place where we celebrate God's blessings and bring the offering of first fruits as we invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us through God's word. The Feast of Weeks was a shadow of the things we experience as Christians through Christ Jesus who is the reality of them.

Our weekly celebration preserves our faith through guiding principles of the law of rest (Scheduled to Death). It prepares us so that we can endure the ever-changing demands on our time. It perpetuates the power of hope that guides us in the face of corruption, conquest, and captivity. The Church established on Pentecost is the reality we find in Christ that was shadowed by the Feast of Weeks for 1500 years. Each Lord's Day we assemble to hold unwaveringly to our hope, to exhort one another to good, and to encourage each other completing the reality of this feast through Christ's Church.

When was the last time you talked to anyone around here who said; "oops, I forgot it was GDCF week!" It is hard to miss, when people talk about it for weeks, when participants in the events spend countless hours preparing for their contests, when we have watched them rush to build the "cow palace" and now see the long line of campers stationed against the fence on 121. People get really excited about the fair, many spend lots of money to take advantage of the rides, the food, the contests, the entertainment, the fellowship, but what long term value does it add to the lives of us who live here? I was visiting with Doris Neff the

other day and asked her if she was going to go out this year? She said; "I've had enough of the fair, it does nothing for me anymore." Doris has attended many fairs in her 94 plus years on this earth, but none of her experiences there have had a lasting value. But when her church family came to have lunch with her last month, she couldn't talk stopping about how much she enjoyed it. She talked about her church family, her faith, and how much she loves her church home, even though she can't make it out anymore. The point is that God wants us to put a priority on those feast and celebrations which bring us closer to Him, yet many of the things we do draw us away from Him and each other.

I think it would be great if we had the respect for the assembly of the church, the koinonia, we once had. But we will not unless we fully understand the value and purpose of our celebration. Critics will say; "hey, the church isn't exciting, I don't get anything out of it, it takes too much time, people are always asking things of me." But those criticisms miss the point of our weekly celebration and gathering. We long to be here to hear the word which we can take with us into our week where God is not always evident or welcome. When we go to our workplace and there is vulgarity, vanity, and vile behavior all around us. How can we stand strong in the Holy Spirit in the face of temptation? We are strong when we come to church, hear the word, and rededicate ourselves to it... *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:15-17)*

What has worked well for 2000 years shouldn't be discarded by those in our culture because there are so many other fun things we can do. Sunday at one time was considered the Lord's Day, and day of rest and reflection, even by those who didn't go to church. Michael Smith, school principal, laments on his blog that there is no "first day of the week" anymore because Saturday and Sunday youth activities have made families so busy that one day just runs into the other without any rest or reflection. Forbes magazine weighed in on the issue in an article entitled; "In the War on Christianity, Churches Increasingly Surrender to Kids' Sunday Sports." Brian Cook points out that the warning of Pope Francis that Sunday sports would lead to the detriment of the church has come true, even though it was prohibited in Catholic Schools around the world. He quotes Richard Lapchick who recognized that sports have become the new worldwide religion at which congregates can come to worship.

Church Celebration is the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks. We gather to worship, to listen, to learn, and to love. Take those gifts out of our life weekly and replace them with selfexaltation, noise, activities, and lust, and what results is generations of people we love vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and fruitless exercise. Those most negatively impacted

are always the children who now seem exploited for the sake of adult entertainment. We should know better, and we would if we celebrated in church as we should.