

FAMILY STRONG:  
**Uncomfortable Family Reunions**

Acts 2:1-21

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Audio: [www.fbcjc.org/sermon/family-strong-uncomfortable-family-reunions/](http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/family-strong-uncomfortable-family-reunions/)

We've all been to family reunions. They can be great. They can be scary and uncomfortable. When I was a child, I dreaded them. Because some great aunt whom I barely knew would come along and pinch my cheek, tell me how much I had grown, or wonder why I had gotten so fat! Have you noticed? You have to watch out at family reunions. You can't talk about politics or religion. Things can get tense. So you revert to the weather, or the Royals and Cardinals (of course, that can get tense also!).

Here's another problem with family reunions. If we're timid or fear the unknown, we will sit with the branch of the family tree we already know. (Just like we sit with people we already know at Wednesday church supper, rather than include new people who are trying out this new experience!). We fear each other because we do not know each other. Yet, great things can come of family reunions. On Janet's side of the family, we had lost touch with some cousins. No one's fault. Just busy and neglectful. A few years ago, we reconnected. And the cousins (now third cousins?), our children's generation, said to the parents, "Where have these cousins been all our lives? Where have you been hiding them? They're cool!"

Pentecost Sunday and the theme "family strong" confront us with one of our flaws. We're all guilty of it. I know I am. I assume that my little corner of the world is normal and the only way to see the world. I call this "county-wide mentality." Dr. Brett Younger shared these amazing stats recently: Less than 10% of the world's population speaks English as their primary language. Less than 5% of the world lives in the U.S. Less than 2% of the world is Baptist. There is a Malaysian saying that too many of us live like a frog under a coconut shell. [*Word and Way*, January 29, 2015, p. 5].

This limited worldview leads to what is being called "othering" (fearing and demonizing people we don't know, just like we might do at a family reunion). I was recently on the campus of Lincoln University to take part in a discussion with the students about race. Fascinating. Black students told story after story of being pre-judged because of dreadlocks or dress or skin color.

But there are other differences. In Jefferson City, have you picked up on the tension between an more rural mindset and a more urban one? It's not bad. It just is. There are doctrinal differences in our church and among our churches. This is where I remind folks that we are Baptist, and Baptists did not originally unite around uniform doctrinal beliefs (we actually resisted it). We united around missions and evangelism. And then there are generational differences. You've heard the studies--the Builders, Boomers, Busters, Gen X, Millennials, etc.

For the first time in history, pastors like me are trying to shepherd eight or nine generations at the same time, in the same congregation, in the same worship service!

So, Acts 2 teaches us not only theology, but sociology and geography. Ancient cities contained an average of 240 residents per acre. For comparison, Manhattan in NYC averages 105 people per acre (and that's with high rises!) [*Center Church*, by Tim Keller, p. 135]. The takeaway? The early Christians had to learn how to be family, how to get along, in very tight quarters! Note the geography. If you can imagine a large map of the world of the Book of Acts, the nations mentioned in vv. 9-11 move roughly from east to west. Consider how multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-racial the church became at Pentecost. Notice how Peter's sermon stresses "all flesh" (v. 17 ) and "everyone who calls on the Lord..." (v. 21).

As someone once said, the best part of being in the church is that it forced me to hang out with people I never would have hung out with! We think that the church exists to link us with people who are like us; perhaps it exists to link us with people NOT like us! My friend John McCallum has a great sermon entitled, "Honey, I Shrunk the Church!" How have we narrowed the church rather than expanded it?

I get the fact that some doubters reject Christ because they see the church as too narrow, bigoted, racially insensitive and much too homogenous. Don't judge us at our worst, but at our best! On our best day, the Church of Jesus is the most interracial, multi-national, culturally inclusive body on the earth!

Simple logic would tell you that God loves all kinds of people, that the Holy Spirit is for everyone. Here's what I mean. I have a question for those who are parents of more than one child. Are they all alike? Which one do you love more? You see? This is Pentecost. Sheer grace, poured down like oil on all of us, undeserving. The Cross of Jesus, the Risen Jesus. Sudden, unmerited life. And we say like some of our younger cousins said at that family reunion, "Where have these cousins been all our lives? Where have you been hiding them? They're cool!"