

June 4 – Pentecost Sunday

Sermon: Visions and Dreams

Acts 2:1-21

Today is Pentecost, a time we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Luke describes this event in dramatic fashion, “A sound like the rush of a violent wind, divided tongues, as of fire and a tongue resting on each of them. All began to speak in other languages.” People in Jerusalem hear the noise and gather around the house. They were from all over the Roman world and heard the good news of Jesus in their native tongue. What was happening confused them. Some of those gathering begin talking about God’s deeds of power while others say that the disciples are drunk. Peter then stands on the roof and gives the first recorded sermon by a disciple. When he finished it says that 3000 were added to the faithful that day. Because of all these events, we often talk about Pentecost being the birth of the church. Up until this time it had been first, a teaching ministry of Jesus, then a shared memory of the resurrection held by the disciples, and now we have the beginnings of a movement that will ultimately triumph over Rome and become the dominant force in the empire.

On this day, it is common for preachers to focus on the coming of the Spirit; the speaking in different languages; the change in the disciples from fearful and hiding behind locked doors to proclaiming the good news; or how the church began to grow. Rarely do we examine Peter’s sermon. I know that I usually skip over it because I believe there are more important messages to address. But not today! Today I want us to look carefully at his message. It will help, I believe, prepare our hearts and our spirit to hear the work of the Kansas City Leadership team. After church they will be sharing their own visions and dreams for this church.

Peter begins by saying something pretty amazing. It is that the Spirit of God will be poured out on all, no exceptions. He mentions men and women, slaves and free. This is the beginnings of a new mission for the church. The salvation message of Jesus is going to be for all. Judaism of that day believed the grace of God was only for Jews and in particular for Jewish men. Women received any blessings of God through the

men in their lives. To talk about God's Spirit being poured out on women so that they can prophesize is a big deal. To talk about God's Spirit being poured out on all, not specifically Jews, is the beginnings of a faith doctrine that will lead to the church's expansion into the Gentile population.

Peter also talks how your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Let's begin with dreams. Ever since Sigmund Freud, dreams have gotten a bad rap. He said they were a window into the unconscious. He pioneered dream therapy. Simply put, by understanding what you dream you have an understanding of the psychological issues that are affecting you today. So now we think of dreams more as nightmares, those scary things that we would just as soon ignore. Even if not, when we have a dream, if we remember it, we wonder what it meant. Dreaming dreams does not seem to be something we wish upon our old men.

Dreams have an entirely different context in the Bible. There, dreams are seen as a way for God to talk to people and at times share the future with them. Here are just a few of the dream times from the Bible. We have Jacob dreaming about a ladder stretching between earth and heaven. It was at a time he was fleeing for his life and the dream gave him reassurance God was with him. Pharaoh has a dream about seven fat and seven empty ears of wheat and then another similar dream, this one with cattle. He concluded it was the gods trying to tell him something. Only Joseph, a dreamer in his own right, could interpret the dream and, through the dream, Egypt learned there would be seven years of plenty followed by famine. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which the prophet Daniel interpreted. It was a word from God about his reign. Then there is Joseph, the father of Jesus. In Matthew much of Joseph's actions are directed by God through dreams. We have him told in dreams to marry Mary, to flee to Egypt, and later to move to Nazareth. Also in the birth account we have God telling the Wise Men to return to their homes and not go back to Herod.

So, Peter was proclaiming that God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, had something to say to the people. One of the ways God would do this was through that ancient medium of dreams. This is why he was saying the old men would dream dreams. Or, they would come to understand what might be the future God had in store

for them. Where do we need to dream dreams? Where do we need the expectation that God is at work?

Visions in the Bible are almost like waking dreams. They are again ways God shares actions to be taken. Prophets in the Old Testament often had visions that led to actions. Elijah and the still small voice of God is one such as these. In the New Testament we hear about Ananias having a vision to go and heal Saul after his Damascus road encounter with Jesus. We hear of Peter having a vision that with God all things are clean which leads to his going to the house of the Gentile Cornelius. And, of course, the entirety of the Book of Revelation is a vision.

Visions are one of the ways God still says that God is active in our lives. Sometimes, visions just happen, without expectation. They, with dreams, are a surprise. Other times you can prepare yourselves to be open to hearing what God wants to say to the church.

I believe that during the past 24 months or so we have been going through such a deliberate time of seeking to hear God's word for this church. Let me share a bit how I see God at work bringing us to the meeting we are going to have in just a few minutes. Joey Olson came to me and said, "We need to send a group to Kansas City. This church is so ready for this." Then began a time of learning and discerning. The more we examined the Leadership Institute and what we might gain from it, the more right it felt. We then came to believe that sending a group of ten would be ideal but we knew we did not have the funds. With some financial help from the annual conference and a small contribution from each of the attendees we sent that number. A group carefully prayed about who should go and that they would be a good team. Our prayers were answered in many ways from who went, to the experiences at Kansas City to meetings since our return. During this past year we have met regularly, with assistance from Melody Romeo as a group facilitator. We have continually worked at being open to what God would have us do. From that has come the mission, purpose and values statements we will present in a bit.

Now I need to be clear that even though I have talked about all the ways we have felt God at work, we understand that this is about more than the 10 people and myself that went. We are talking about this church and its ministries. We believe we have been given a vision but you are to help us to discern if it is valid or needs work. Also, this is more than words on a paper. We see these words as having specific implications for our future, some of which we will be able to share with you in a few minutes. Some of the changes God is preparing us for will come as a surprise to all of us and we will only discover them as we live into the future together. But, we feel we have been given visions by God and we hope you stay to hear about it.

So on this Pentecost Day we need to continue to pray for dreams and for visions, to believe God is at work in this church and this community and that we have a specific role to play, one God is trying to tell us about if we will only listen. When Peter talks about dreams and visions he saw them as a manifestation of the Spirit to empower the church and move it forward. Pentecost is celebrated because in looking back over history we see that this is exactly what happened. God's Spirit was at work at Pentecost and in the life of the early church.

It is still at work. I hope you stay afterwards to hear our dreams and our visions. Perhaps a few years from now we will look back at this meeting celebrating how God's Spirit was manifest in the church anew.