

“Dreams and Visions”

Acts 2:1-21

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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There is so much going on in today’s text, so much going on in the experience of Pentecost!

Not only is this the day in the church when our sanctuary is covered in bright reds and the scripture is filled with nearly unimaginable images of tongues of fire and winds, but this is the day when we remember this story that makes our identity as Christians possible.

After all, had the disciples *not* carried on Jesus’ work...had they *not* found the courage to keep going...had they *not* been willing to wait on the Spirit and then to follow her promptings...we might not be here at all. And I think we sometimes forget to appreciate that. It is because of the disciples’ willingness to risk and to work that we are here today. That is why Christians have long celebrated today as the birthday of the church.

And there’s even more going on in this story.

In recording this story in the book of Acts, Luke tells us that not only did the disciples talk about who Jesus was and the difference he made, but when they did, people understood it in their own language. And this is significant for many reasons, one of which is that they were living under the thumb of Rome in a time when the official language was Greek. Because this earthly kingdom demanded loyalty and wanted people to assimilate, they would have been expected to use Greek for conducting business and for official actions (Joel B. Green, [Ministry Matters™ | Commentary for Pentecost, Acts 2:1-21](#)).

So, let’s not miss the significance of an experience where each person heard in their native language. This would have been an affirmation of their individual identity and of the diversity that would make up the church, an affirmation also that the kin-dom of God is not like earthly kingdoms.

There is so much going on here.

In fact, there is so much going on that by the time we get to the part where Peter quotes the prophet Joel, we have almost stopped listening. After all, it is also kind of a long story.

But I don’t think we want to miss what the prophet Joel said:

*‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

*Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.”*

This picture, which Peter certainly understands is breaking into their reality in this Pentecost experience, is again a reminder of the diversity and equity of God’s kin-dom, a diversity and equity that will be reflected, at least for a while, within the Jesus movement.

But there is even more here.

Here in these words, Peter claims not only the importance of prophecy but also the importance of visions and dreams.

After all, throughout scripture it is often in visions and dreams that God speaks.

In our own lives, we have experiences of both dreams and visions being places where we get in touch with hopes, with possibilities, with callings that might even seem impossible.

“Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” says Peter, quoting the prophet Joel.

Now, I like to say that perhaps the old men are dreaming dreams because they fall asleep as soon as they sit down in their recliners. But, I’m pretty sure that wasn’t what Joel was thinking.

So, what do we do with visions and dreams? How are we to hear this? Is the distinction important?

We had a lengthy discussion in Bible Study about this question. We were able to name some differences: visions often point us toward the future, while dreams often deal with current and past events; visions come when we are awake, while dreams are happening while we sleep; visions often grow from our conscious imagining of what could be, while dreams come from the unconscious mind - they are involuntary but very real.

Yet, scripturally we see God speaking in both. We see God meeting people in the midst of their daily activity, sometimes in surprising visions, other times in their intentional work of visioning where they are to go. And we see God meeting people in the depths of their rest, appearing in dreams. So, perhaps the difference is not as important as the invitation to be aware of the ways that God is speaking to us.

After all, perhaps it is at the intersection of dreams and visions where we find God’s call.

If dreams help us reflect on the past and visions point us toward the future...then the intersection helps us ask how the past informs the future, how we learn from where we have been to embrace where we are going.

This sometimes means looking back at realities like the equity and diversity of the early church and claiming again its importance. It sometimes means looking back at realities of which we need to repent, like the many centuries when the church strayed from its diverse and equitable roots, when it became focused on power, when instead of critiquing the empires of the world, it became entangled with them.

Perhaps it is where dreams and visions intersect that we can claim again the intentions of who we are called to be and the hopes God has for the world, and then we can commit to them.

I think that has been part of our own commitment to equity, to diversity, to an open table. These things didn't come about because they are easy or because they were popular, but rather came about with the combination of intentional remembering and faithful anticipating. They came about because we listened to God and asked questions about how God was calling us back to essential commitments of our faith even in new times and understandings.

But that is only one example.

The reality is that the work of listening to the dreams and the visions through which God speaks, is ongoing work.

And sometimes it is difficult work. Sometimes we fail to dream because we don't want to have to name difficult truths. Sometimes we fail to vision because we worry that we might be disappointed, that things might not go as we hope. Sometimes life is just exhausting and there is too much else to take our energy - for some their very survival - so that dreaming feels like a luxury. In fact, even those of us who are comfortable and safe, who are mostly secure, still know over these last several years what it is to simply be exhausted by the realities of life and to sometimes lose our ability to dream.

But as Pastor Mary S. Hulst writes reflecting on this Joel passage, "You will dream again, God is saying to [the] people. You will dream again. You will no longer be so concerned with survival that you will not be able to dream. You will no longer lie awake all night with worry so that there is no space to dream. You will no longer look to your future with anxious doubt, with palpable fear, with a bad feeling in the pit in your stomach. You will look to your future with hope. And not just the young, who will not remember the pain, but even the old ones who have seen it all and know better. Even they will dream" ([Pentecost Dreaming | The Banner](#)).

We are called to embrace the dreams and visions, to live into the fullness of who God invites us to be, to lead the way in creating a world of justice, compassion, equity, and joy for all people.

A song made famous in the 1965 Broadway musical "Man of La Mancha" says this:

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To dream the impossible dream
To fight the unbeatable foe
To bear with unbearable sorrow
To run where the brave dare not go.

To right the unrightable wrong
To love pure and chaste from afar
To try when your arms are too weary
To reach the unreachable star.

This is my quest, to follow that star
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far
To fight for the right without question or pause
To be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause.

Friends, today is a day when we celebrate the coming of the Spirit. It is a day when we remember the story of the first Christian Pentecost.

It is also a day when we are invited again to dream and to vision...to not only hope, but to live in ways that make God's hopes for the church and for this world a reality.

Yes, it may seem impossible...it may seem unreachable...the wrongs of this world may sometimes feel unrightable. But we are invited to dream together with God, to let the Spirit move among us and help us capture a vision for who we are called to be, to commit to living in the ways that bring wholeness and healing to all people and all creation. Let us dream...let us vision...let us live faithfully together. Amen.