

**Dreams & Prophecies**  
First UMC of Pocatello  
Trinity Sunday  
June 12, 2022

Acts 2:14-21

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On the day of Pentecost, following the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the explosion of multilingual witness, and the gathering of the curious crowd, Peter stood up and delivered his very first sermon. It was, in fact, the first Christian sermon in history – the first Spirit-blessed opening of an ancient text to reveal that Jesus of Nazareth was – is, always will be! – the saving Christ. There is so much good stuff here. For example, we can learn a lot about the essence of Christian proclamation, or about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. But I find myself wanting to hear Peter’s message *itself* with fresh ears, to listen, like a member of that astonished crowd, to the gospel. On the day of the Church’s birth, what could not help but be said?

Beginning today, we take three Sundays to move through Peter’s sermon and the peoples’ response to it. *Here* is an ancient hope at last fulfilled. *Here* is the shocking pronouncement of universal grace. *Here* is the tectonic shift in humankind’s situation: God’s Holy Spirit poured out upon us, a Spirit described by Cuban American theologian and Methodist elder Justo Gonzalez as “a leveling power that destroys privilege.”<sup>1</sup>

**[Read Acts 2:14-21]**

Peter begins with a scripture, a word from the prophet Joel, and announces its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. When the Spirit falls, the people of God are given dreams, given prophecies.

*Dreams.* Sleep scientists tell us that the brain is just as active during our dreaming phases of sleep as it is during our times of conscious wakefulness; artists of all kinds attest to the importance of doodling, daydreaming, play; psychologists tell us that our dreams give us access to the longings, ponderings, and insights that are within us, simmering beneath the surface.

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<sup>1</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit*, 46.

Everything we have ever experienced becomes fodder for our dreams, both the good and the bad, things we have willfully integrated into our sense of self and things we have repressed because they were painful, strange, unsightly. But dreams become the playground of possibility. In them, the mind goes rogue, assembles all the nuts, bolts, and colorful bars of experience into unanticipated structures and forms *A dream is a creative perception.*

In the Spirit's hands, dreams become the creative mechanism by which God shows us how things that we consider impossible might become possible. We can fall into a rut, take the "real world" to be hopelessly static, unchanging, necessarily the way that it is. But if we could just tilt the kaleidoscope of our perception a little, how would things fall into place differently? A dream is the tilt.

In our time and culture, we are accustomed to saying to young people, "Follow your dreams." But, in fact, Peter announces that in the community of the Spirit, it is the old who are given God-sized dreams. Those who have passed into middle age or into their twilight years, who have collected vast, ever-growing quantities of experience, are, with God's inspiration, masters of that playground of possibility. If you consider yourself, strictly speaking, no longer young, welcome to the company of those who are able to liberate us from our stuckness, our inertia, our fatalism, by helping us dream.

It makes me wonder if we have embraced God's new world and reckoned with the gift of the Spirit. It is a sin that the world – and sometimes the church – acts as though older folks are irrelevant, abandons them to the numbing false communion of the television. Didn't Abram set off to find a new country as an old man? Didn't Noah build an ark in his six-hundredth year? Moses glimpsed the promised land; Jacob blessed his sons. These were people who dreamed.

What kind of world would we create if we believed that the old could be the fount of new, creative possibilities for our future? What if, the older we got, the more loosely we held our assumptions about "the way things have always been" and "the way things need to be," and instead embraced the Spirit-given task of seeing that we can do anything holy and good with God's help? What if it was the old who were most capable of listening to their hearts, and calling forth the deep things of the spirit?

Dreams. Dreams and prophecies.

*Prophecies.* Biblically speaking, *a prophecy is an act of moral perception.* Abraham Joshua Heschel was a twentieth century Jewish theologian and civil rights activist. He defined the prophet as a person who has “human sympathy with the divine pathos.” In other words, prophets are those who are tuned in to the *emotional* life of God. They have a sense for what brings God joy and contentment; they feel what breaks God’s heart, what makes God sad, what enrages God. They are empathes with the divine, and they make the heart of God audible through their speech and visible through their actions.

A prophecy is an act of uncovering. If there is cruelty and dishonesty masquerading in the world as something necessary or good, the prophet will see it and expose it. If there is suffering that is being muffled and ignored, the prophet will hear and amplify it. If there is beauty or hope to be had beyond verifiable evidence, the prophet will be its tireless advocate. Most of the time it is not easy, fun, or enviable to be a prophet, to see things how God sees them, to realize that the stakes are high in every area of our lives.

We tend to designate the role of moral perception to those who have some sort of professional training or social privilege. Who decides what is good and right and worthy of human attention, what is wrong or unlawful or destructive? The clergy, the politician, the judge, the professor! Or at least that’s one way. In our internet age, everyone feels that they have the authority to make moral pronouncements; it’s a Babel out there of absolutist statements about what – about who – is right and wrong. But, follow the trail: most of that cacophony is paid for by big money, by people or groups with social power. Prior to the internet, we thought moral authority was earned, achieved, inherited. Today, moral authority is bought and sold.

In these “last days,” to whom does the Spirit give the power of prophecy, of vision, of holiness? To our sons and our daughters, to the young, to future generations! To male and female slaves, to the oppressed classes and castes of the world! With the Spirit, it is the young, the poor, the oppressed, who proclaim, *Thus saith the Lord.* When the Spirit gets ahold of a young person, of a community of young people, it is not unrealistic, idealistic, pie-in-the-sky naivety that we hear speaking, but righteousness; when the Spirit gets ahold of those who are unfree, a song that will shake the foundation of every literal or metaphorical prison is sung.

So, David, the least and youngest in his family, is anointed to be king. God tells the young Jeremiah, “Before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations...Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.” Teenage, unwed Mary declared that the order or the world has been

upended by her willingness to carry the Christ in her womb, that the mighty had been cast down from their thrones and the lowly lifted up.

What kind of world would we live in if we believed that the young had things to reveal to us about the heart of God? What kind of world would we took the visions of the poor and poor in spirit to be our compass?

Now, I don't mean to suggest that adults or socially privileged persons never see things clearly. And I don't mean to suggest that the dreams of the young take a backseat to those of their elders. What Joel and Peter are proclaiming is that, when the Spirit comes, *our expectations, our assumptions* about who is fit do what, who is fit to be a certain kind of person or play a certain kind of role, get scrambled. The gifts that we tend to look for in one group are given just as equally to another. The Spirit is poured out upon *all flesh*. We are not permitted to suppose about any single category of people – old or young; male or female; slave or free; black or white; native or foreigner; straight or queer – “Well, not *them*.”

That's the larger point, the root of it all: The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all who trust in the gracious gift of Jesus' love. Unless we are willing to listen to the dreams of the old, the visions of the young, the prophecies of the poor; unless we are willing to become spacious people and enter into curious communion with all flesh; unless we are willing to recognize that social privilege is often very different than spiritual privilege, then we will miss the fullness of how God is moving among us, the clarity of what God is speaking to us, the beauty of what God is creating us to be.

And here, at the end, it is important to say that for some of us, the challenge is to break through every negative message that has been laid upon us and to hear God's Spirit speaking within *us*. It is to believe that I, even I, am included in *all flesh*. The challenge, the invitation, the gift is to learn to stand in our own humble authority as vessels of God's Spirit – to dream dreams, to see visions, to prophesy.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.