

June 12, 2011, Pentecost

John 7:37-39, Acts 2: 1-21

Visions, Dreams, and Prophecies

On that first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus Christ in the form of a mighty wind. Tongues of fire came and landed on their heads, and they began speaking in other languages.

Everyone who was there could understand them in their own languages, even though they were from many different countries.

I have to say, when I walk around this building on a Sunday morning and I hear Vietnamese, three different dialects of Filipino, and English being spoken, I kind of wish the Holy Spirit would give me the ability to understand and to speak everyone's language!

Unfortunately, I have not been given that gift. Learning languages is difficult for me, especially when there is more than one to learn!

But there is one thing that shows in this morning's reading from the Book of Acts that I CAN compare to this church, and that's that the people

present at the first Pentecost had many different languages, even more than we do, and yet they were all Christians, just like we are!

The differences in languages is overcome by having one faith, one hope, one Lord!

In our scripture reading, after the Holy Spirit blows into the room and people are speaking so many different languages, with tongues of fire on their heads, some cynical bystanders don't get it at all and remark that they all must be drunk.

And Peter answers---clearly, eloquently, passionately---that they are not drunk----it's only 9 o'clock in the morning! And then Peter, this Galilean fisherman, not highly educated or sophisticated, quotes scripture to them.

From the prophet Joel---"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. "

I want you to notice that in this context, it seems that Peter is referring to that time, when he was speaking, as “the last days”. People have been thinking they were living in the end times for a long time. And still no one knows the day or the hour.

But I don't want to talk about the end times this morning. I want to talk to you about something more important---how we are living here and now, in this place and at this time, because how we live this life that God has given us is how we stay ready for whenever the time will be that God calls us to heaven, ready for whatever will happen next.

Right now we need to be about the business of living life abundant and not sitting around waiting for the end times! We need to keep our lamps trimmed and burning---the fire in our hearts burning as we live lives of passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The cross and flame that is our United Methodist symbol, that is now on the outside of our sanctuary, symbolizes that passion for Christ, those hearts on fire for the Gospel of Christ. And we need to live up to that!

And so today, I want to talk about dreams, visions, and prophecies.

The prophet Joel said that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams.”

I am not a young man or an old man, but I am sometimes a prophet--- not in terms of predicting the future, but in that I do sometimes speak the word of God to people, so that is what I have been praying and seeking lately.

And I think that this passage does not intend to restrict dreams and visions to men only,

So what I want to share this morning is my dream of the future, and my vision for this church.

This is something I have been praying about for about two years now, that God would show me what I should do here, what needs to be done, what God wants us to do together.

I have been reluctant to say this until now, and I still hesitate, because I am not sure this is complete or 100% correct, but I want to put it out in front of you so that it will become part of our conversations----so that we can dream and envision our future together.

This is my dream of what Linda Vista United Methodist Church can be---

As one church, we will increase the number of joint activities that the Vietnamese and the English-language ministries do together.

Pastor Mary and I will participate regularly in each other's services on Communion Sundays and when there are baptisms and members joining the church.

Sooner or later we will no longer have two separate budgets, but one. As one church, it will no longer make sense to separate our money.

We will make decisions and plans and run programs together, still allowing for some things to happen in Vietnamese, but with a lot of cross-over between the two ministries.

The facilities will become more attractive and welcoming. God's House will be the place where we gather to worship, to study, to pray, where we hear the voice of God and then go out from, so that we will serve in the ways we have been called to do.

We will increase our service to God and to the world. Missions will become a priority, a constant focus, whether we are going near or far, whether we are serving in groups or as individuals. We will give more of our time, talents, and resources to build the Kingdom of God here on earth.

This gets us back to our Wesleyan roots of social holiness, of working to bring about God's justice in the world.

It means reactivating our United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men groups, with a focus on supporting missions worldwide, of educating ourselves about the needs and the programs that are addressing those needs.

It means collaborating with other churches in the area to expand what we are able to do by combining our funds, our members, and our spirits.

As the foundation of social holiness, we will also increase our own personal holiness through spiritual growth and practices. We will become a congregation grounded in prayer and in study together.

We will all be able to name and claim the spiritual gifts that God has given us, and every one of us will use those gifts to help God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

We will all belong to a small group based on our passions and interests. These will be Covenant Groups, another very Wesleyan tradition, but they will also be study groups and action teams, acting on those passions in whatever ways the group decides on.

That is my dream!

Now I want to talk about my vision for this church.

A vision is different from a dream. A vision is received from God in prayer and study. It's God's plans for us, and it will come to pass probably after all of us have gone to live with God, and are no longer here. The dream leads to the vision---- more long-term, more of a distant goal.

Not as clear to me as a dream, but more like the end result of the dream.

In the future, we will be well-known in the neighborhood. The new sign, the Doring Bravo Memorial sign, helps us be more easily identified in the neighborhood, but I am talking about more than that.

Being more readily identified by people who pass by is a start, but what I am talking about is more than people knowing our name. I am talking about being known for our ministry---our service to the world----our outreach and our missions!

People will not only say, "I know where Linda Vista United Methodist Church is!" They will say, "That's where they help people. That's where they feed the hungry, send people out to other places to help others, where everyone serves in their community, where they love God and each other and the whole world!"

People will say, "That's where they live out what they believe. That's where they really understand what Christ said."

This is more than a dream. It's God's reality. Our children's children and grandchildren will know God because of what we will do here. The children of the neighborhood children will know God because of what we do here.

The perception of people who know what happens here will not be the same as so many people think about Christians today---that Christians are judgmental and hypocritical. Instead, we will be the people who are authentic and loving and truly follow Christ---

The people who give a cup of cold water to the thirsty, who visit the sick and those in prison. The people who serve the poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless.

This is who the people of Linda Vista UMC are in the vision:

The people who transform the world by being true disciples of Jesus Christ.

The dream, the vision.

This room will be the place where the Holy Spirit fills us up every Sunday, and in between Sundays, too, so that we can hear God's call for us, so that we are empowered to answer that call, so that we know what to do with that power,

So that we are servants of Christ, washing the feet of the world, feeding the 5000, proclaiming the Good News to the poor, release to the captives.

It will be where our own eyes are opened to see Christ in everyone around us, where our ears will hear both the cries of the needy and the voice of God.

It will be our place of renewal and refilling, but not our constant dwelling place. Because this is not our home. We are just passing through.

And now I am getting to the prophecy part. As I said at the beginning, prophecy is not always about predicting the future. In fact, the prophets addressed the issues of their day while at the same time they proclaimed God's words that would also be relevant in the future.

So I want to say something now that I hope will always be relevant for Linda Vista United Methodist Church, even after all of us are gone to live in the place that Christ is preparing for us.

This is where we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This is where God reaches down to the world to show love, grace, mercy, and justice. This is where we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

This is where people of God gather and where they are sent out from.

This is a little piece of the Kingdom of God, here on earth. This is where people can find the incarnate God.

The dream, the vision, the prophecy.

Come Holy Spirit come!

Come like a wind and stir our hearts, stirring the embers, fanning the flames until we are at full blaze, ready to light the world on fire with the power, grace, and love of God!

Come Holy Spirit come!

Amen!