

**Out of a Dream**  
**Rev. Matt Landry**  
**August 26, 2018**

**Scripture Reading: Joel 2: 21-23, 28-32**

Surely he has done great things!

<sup>21</sup>Do not be afraid, land of Judah;  
be glad and rejoice.

Surely the Lord has done great things!

<sup>22</sup> Do not be afraid, you wild animals,  
for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green.

The trees are bearing their fruit;  
the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.

<sup>23</sup> Be glad, people of Zion,  
rejoice in the Lord your God,  
for he has given you the autumn rains  
because he is faithful.

He sends you abundant showers,  
both autumn and spring rains, as before.

<sup>28</sup>And afterward,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.

<sup>29</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

<sup>30</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens  
and on the earth,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

<sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

<sup>32</sup> And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved;  
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there will be deliverance,  
as the Lord has said,  
even among the survivors  
whom the Lord calls.

If you weren't able to be here last Sunday afternoon for the C4 concert, you really missed out. The choir, which includes a few people from our Meridian Street Choir, offered a wonderful concert titled, "The Stuff of Dreams." My favorite song by far was the beautiful rendition of Frank Tichelli's choral piece based on the poem by American poet Sarah Teasdale titled "There Will Be Rest." A few of the lyrics read, "I will make this world of my devising. I will make this world, out of

a dream." While it wasn't the author's intent, I received these words as God's words to me. "I will make this world of my devising, out of a dream, out of a dream."

Last week, we were challenged to consider and reflect on what it means to be a Christian. It was a powerful sermon offered by Pastor Steve. To sum it up; live your faith, do something. I'm sure he said other things, but that's basically what I heard. I agree. We do need to live out our faith, but in order to live it out and move forward, we have to move toward something. What if that something was God's dream; God's dream for our world, for our church, and for our lives?

It's hard for us to even imagine what the Kingdom of God could look like. We pray every single Sunday, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It's what we pray for, but could we describe God's Kingdom come? I remember sitting in a Sunday school class that I was facilitating one time and asked that very question. I received blank stares back. I tried to prompt responses a little more by asking what they believed. What are those values we carry with us? Peace, justice, equality among all people, no poverty, no homelessness, no war; we we're getting somewhere. Ideas were flowing, then someone had to ask that question, but how do we get there? But it begins with a dream, God's dream of how God is calling us to go, to move, to be.

This morning we look to the little book of the prophet Joel. Does anyone even know where this book is in your Bible? It's right before Amos and right after Hosea. I really narrowed it down. It's only 6 pages long in my Bible, so you might be thinking, couldn't I find inspiration elsewhere? Yet this prophet proclaims hope to a people then and now who desperately need it. It's also the words, from Verse 28 on, that Peter speaks to inform the festive crowds in Jerusalem after Pentecost, to describe what will happen after Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter helps us bring these words from Joel from the time of exile to the early church.

Joel speaks of a time in post-exile. "Do not be afraid, be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things!" But God is not done. "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy," speak the truth. "Your old men will dream dreams," even at an old age they will still dream. "Your young men will see visions," they will move forward with God's vision. And what's most amazing is that the Spirit will be poured out on men and women, on all people. Even in Acts, they were all together, people from every nation under heaven and the Spirit made them one, it brought them together. It's a pouring out the Holy Spirit in Joel and in Acts. When we find Peter in Acts, just after Pentecost speaking, we find a fresh pouring out of the Holy Spirit again. During Joel's time in the exile, they experience what felt like a silence of God. There were no prophets, they were lost and they receive this word from God through Joel that the Spirit will again be poured out upon them. And even for Peter and those in Acts, they had been through that time of grief and silence when Jesus had died, then rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven and there was a fresh pouring out of the Spirit where the church moved in the power of God's Spirit to live out God's dream. So as we reflect on these words in Joel that are used again by Peter in Acts, I have to ask, are we in a time where the Spirit is moving anew, where the Spirit is being poured out again?

I often hear in church circles of every denomination about the decline of the church and the challenges we face, but I continue to wonder, "Is the Spirit being poured out again in a new

way?" The late Phyllis Tickle was an author and theologian in the Episcopal tradition who wrote often about the changing landscape of the church. She wrote, "As this new form of Christianity and this new way of being Church and Kingdom mature, they, like their predecessors in earlier upheavals, soon must come to address the question of authority—to address the question of how now shall we live and by whose definitions of right and wrong, correct and incorrect, holy and heretical. The center of our new authority will lie, as it did in earlier presentations, not with political or church hierarchies, nor even in sola scriptura and inerrancy as it is popularly defined. Rather, it will lie within the realm of the Spirit and an awe-filled, discerning intercourse with it."

And what do people in the midst of the Spirit do? "Your sons and daughters will speak the truth. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see God's vision for the world, for the church, and for our lives. Praying for the movement of the Spirit can be kind of scary, but it's greatly needed today. The Spirit is the wind you can feel, but can't see, the fire that blazes, the dove that flies, and I have heard that the Spirit is the wild goose that you can chase, but you can never catch or stop. The Spirit moves and it's up to us to catch the dream, the vision, the movement of God's Kingdom.

Can you dream of a world where God's dream is lived out? How would it be different? I wonder if God dreams of a world where there's peace between nations and on city streets where people turn their weapons into gardening tools, where there is justice for the poor, where the environment is made whole, where everyone sees every part of creation as gleaming with the very beauty of God, where there are healed wounds and where we wipe away each other's tears, and where everyone's lives and hearts and souls are filled with peace and meaning and purpose. In 1670, Blaise Pascal described a God shaped hole in our lives and I believe God dreams about the day when God fills our deepest longing for wholeness. How do we make this dream a reality? I believe that the people of God, from the time of the prophet Joel to the time of Peter in Acts to all of us today, are the ones to make this dream a reality. I know it's possible, if we live and work to make this dream, God's dream, a reality in our church and in each of our lives.

On Sunday evening, I had the privilege of being the overnight host for Interfaith Hospitality Network. While I usually try to fill in where there's a need, I'm embarrassed to say that I hadn't stayed overnight before, even though there are some days where I feel like I'm sleeping at the church I'm here so much. I really enjoyed the chance to visit with the families we're hosting and my bedroom upstairs afforded me the time to do a little reading, reflecting and praying without the normal distractions of TV or the computer. As I was praying for the families and volunteers on Sunday night and began reflecting on our hosting, I kept feeling in my heart, "This is what God has called us to do. We use our building, our time, our energy to house families in need. This is God's dream." I told the families and the extra volunteers from the Lutheran Church who brought dinner that night "that at Meridian Street we use this building as an extension of our homes. We welcome guests and family. We baptize our littlest ones. We say good bye to loved ones. We have community meals together. We celebrate the holidays together. We do all of that here. This is our home. And you are welcome in our home."

I believe this is God's dream for our church. When we collectively participate in this and many other ministries, we are making God's dream a reality. It's about setting a vision that creates a

space here and now to live into God's dream. Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote, "God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family, that we are made for togetherness, for goodness, and for compassion." If you are feeling like I am that there's this fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and we are beginning to dream God's dream anew, then what's next for our church and for our lives? Dream with me for a moment.

When I was in the Philippines four years ago, I had the chance to serve with the Missionaries of the Poor, a Catholic order of brothers who serve in the slums of Manila. It was an inspiring week. I saw the brothers serving the poorest of the poor with kindness, courage, and great joy! One morning, we attended Church of the Holy Family for Morning Prayer. I learned that the large, several story apartment building near the church was actually owned by the church. They bought it so families in the neighborhood could have a home and the members could offer care of the people who live there. The Holy Family Church dreamed God's dream for their neighborhood and built an entire building to house the poor. What is God's dream for our church?

I recently read an article about First United Methodist Church of Los Angeles, the oldest Protestant church in the city. In the early 1980's the church felt like God was calling them to sell their historic building and use the proceeds to support affordable housing units. Without a building of its own, the congregation began meeting in a senior housing facility it helped to build. The church's remaining piece of property is a parking lot, which generates income to support ministry. Their current pastor began with First UMC on July 1<sup>st</sup> of last year. On her very first Sunday, Pastor Mandy McDow, asked her congregation to pick up everything, chairs, altar, candles, cross, Bible, even the baptismal font, and they marched outside to worship in a tent that was set up in the parking lot. She said that morning that the history of the church and its ministries have been committed to providing housing, but no one would hear that message from inside a building. They had to get outside and worship in solidarity with the homeless. Pastor Mandy said recently, "We will remain unhoused as a church in solidarity with our houseless neighbors, until we can build something that will provide housing for them and for the church. We've listened to the prayers of the people for stability and access to housing. We believe that the barrier to worship with us is much lower when we meet outside."

I can tell that many of the Trustees are starting to wiggle in their pews. I'm not suggesting that either of these examples should be our vision, but I do know that we need to dream God's dream for the future of our congregation and for our lives. When we think about what we are capable of either as a congregation or even as individual Christians and we think we can't live that dream, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, we can make God's dream a reality.

When we, as a congregation, serve others and vision for the future, we are making God's dream a reality. When you serve, when you pray, when you live out your faith, you are living out God's dream for you. We can't do it alone, we need a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Who knows where that will take us? Maybe we're called to build homes for the homeless. Maybe we're called to set up microloans to help families get on their feet. Maybe we're called to help people learn new skills to find employment. Let's dream God's dream together.

You might remember that song that I shared at the beginning, well there's another song that came to mind this week titled "Dream God's Dream." Dream God's dream, Holy Spirit, help us dream...Of a world where there is justice, and where everyone is free to build and grow and love and to simply have enough. The world will change when we dream God's dream."

My brothers and sisters in Christ, may we pray for a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit upon us that together may we dream God's dream and together make it a reality. Out of a dream, God's dream, will come God's Kingdom.

**Let's pray:**

*In prayer, we enter into the presence of the Most Holy. In prayer we dream, and our dreams are shaped by the movement of your Holy Spirit in our lives. On this day, O Lord our God, awaken our dreams and inspire our vision so that we might see with clear eyes the hope and fullness of life in you. We pray for clarity and courage to see that dream of your Kingdom. By your mercy and grace, grant us wisdom and strength, that we might live into your dream for our congregation and our lives. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.*