

Acts 2: 1-8, 11b-21

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Lately I've been thinking about the ways in which our dreams for the future change over the years. Of course, I understand they must change because the world changes and we change. As we age, hopefully our worldview expands and our priorities shift and I think this impacts what we dream about.

When I was a child, thanks to Walt Disney, I dreamed of being a princess. Disney made princess-ing very appealing. Princesses wear beautiful ball gowns and live in cool castles.

Some princesses, like Princess Jasmine in Aladdin, even have majestic royal pets. That lifestyle doesn't hold as much appeal to me now as it did when I was younger. As much as I still love Disney movies, today, thanks to theologians like Howard Thurman and Dr. Walter Brueggemann, and important role models in seminary and in this room, my dreams are different. They are less about what I will be or do and more about what I hope the world will be like. That dream consumes a lot of mind and heart these days and it is very often what motivates me.

That dream is important to me in this season. There was a season between Disney and Brueggemann, though, in which I think I must have stopped dreaming. Somewhere along the way, I got the idea that dreams were for children and dealing with reality was for adults. Maybe it was in the busy season of parenting small children when time to dream seemed a luxury I did not have. To be clear, at the time I was pretty wrapped up in Christopher's dream of skating his way into professional hockey and Andrew's dream of becoming a herpetologist to save all the snakes. I was busy working to make their dreams a reality. But over the years they have changed their dreams too.

In the Pentecost story in the book of Acts, it says young people see visions and old people dream dreams. Do you think visions are really just for the young and dreams are only for the old? Here is the story. This is Acts 2: 1-8, 11b-21.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were

filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,

and your offspring shall prophesy,
and your young people shall see visions,
and your old people shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even people who are enslaved, all people,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show signs in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

This is a cool story. I mean...wind, fire, people speaking different languages all at the same time, and being accused of being drunk. It certainly is an attention grabber. Jesus' followers were gathered that day to celebrate the Feast of the Harvest, a Jewish festival celebrating the wheat harvest. It was celebrated 50 days after Passover which explains why we call the day Pentecost. Pentecost comes from the Greek word for fifty. Over time, the Festival of the Harvest became about more than the harvest. By the time this story was written, it had also

become the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, Moses in turn gave the Law to the Israelites.

According to the story, the first indicator Jesus' followers had that something out of the ordinary was happening was the "sound like the rush of a violent wind" that filled the house in which they were gathered. This summer, throughout the "Winds of Change" series, you will see that the biblical authors used wind as a way of signaling that things were about to change. The Pentecost story is a good example of that.

I imagine the wind they heard outside was a lot like what we hear as a strong storm front approaches. It sounded like wind that blows shingles off roofs and transports trash cans a block away from their homes. It was the kind of wind that catches us by surprise and sends us running for cover. Wind, whether used as a literary symbol or experienced as an act of nature, brings change. In the fall, cold winds are very often one of the first signs of the changing seasons, winter is just around the corner. The same is true in the Bible. Wind alerts the reader that a new season for God's people has come, and it often takes them by surprise.

The wind in the Pentecost story alerts us to a new season in the lives of Jesus' followers. A season in which just as Jesus had been the revelation of the Holy to them, they become the revelation of the Holy to others, and this was made possible through the gift of the Spirit. For the first time, the people of God understood the Holy to be loose in the world. Things were about to change big time.

They found out right away that the Spirit cannot be contained or put in a corner. The very first thing she did was make it clear that the God of Israel was for everyone. This good news was shared in the language of each one present so there was no mistake. Rev. Dr. Lisa Davison of Phillips Theological Seminary explains it like this, "For some reason, on that day, the followers of Jesus were filled with the Divine spirit and finally realized the full impact of Jesus' message of inclusivity. Rather than expecting everyone else to understand them, they responded to Jesus' call to understand other people. To meet them where they are."

There is a lot more to understanding our neighbors and meeting them where they are than linguistics, especially here in NE Oklahoma when most of our neighbors speak English. Yet, there are many people who haven't heard the kind of good news we have to share. And I think maybe it's because we haven't been speaking the language of their hearts. They may be able to define the words, "You are loved," but to comprehend what they mean, they must be shown. That is exactly the kind of work the Holy Spirit breezed in to help Jesus' early followers with and the Holy's message of inclusion and love for all people, still needs to be shared today. Showing up and showing our neighbors they are loved is the work of each one of us and the work of this church.

The thing about this work is that because people change and the world changes, our work must change too. A few weeks ago, Anna, Scott, and I attended a clergy retreat in which the facilitator walked us through the process of first imagining what the world would be like in 30 years and then imagining what the role of the church will be based on that. We were assured there were no right or wrong answers, which was good because there were very different points of view represented in that room, but there was a common thread. The people in that room know that whatever the world is like in the future, the church must be about providing a safe space for people to belong and be loved.

As we talked, it was clear some clergy in the room are convinced the world is going to be hostile and they were pessimistic about whether the Church would still exist. Others, though, were more optimistic about the world and the Church. The ministers who felt strongly that the world would be changed and not for the better, imagined the work of the Church would revolve around grief support. The idea being that people will have lost so much that the Church's role would be to help them manage that loss. My dream for the future isn't going to let me sign on to that story, even though so many days it seems like we are headed the wrong direction.

In preparation for my sabbatical, I've been thinking a lot about the future and dreaming about what's next. The Pentecost story caused me to wonder what the difference is between a vision and a dream: "young people see visions and old people dream dreams." The difference may seem like splitting hairs, but maybe it matters here? It could be argued that a vision is a completely new idea or line of thought that comes to the mind of the visioner. It is something they have never

seen or experienced. But a dream, on the other hand, is based on the dreamer's real experiences. I experienced Disney princess movies, so I wanted to be a princess. I didn't come up with the idea of princess-ing on my own. Our dreams are it's rooted in what is already familiar. Think of it as a new arrangement to an old song.

Tomatoes, Tomatoes, you may be thinking. Admittedly, the words, at least in English, are enough alike that we use them interchangeably. But clearly, the writer of Joel, who the author of Acts quoted, thought they were different. So, why might people who are young see visions and people who are old dream dreams? Fortunately, I found a theologian this week who wondered the same thing and wrote about it! Minister and educator, Candace Simpson, wrote, "...Perhaps the young are said to "see visions" because the Holy Spirit grants them an imagination of things that have not yet happened. Perhaps the elders are said to "dream dreams" because they can recollect stories over their lives and dance with them in new ways. Both visions and dreams are exercises of imagination..."¹ I don't know if this is the difference the author had in mind, but I like it because it reminds me that each one of us, from the very young to the very old have something to teach this community and something important to give to the world. We must recognize and honor that if we dream of a world made whole. This summer, part of your work will be to dream dreams (or see visions if you prefer), about the world and about this church. As you do, I hope you will answer these questions: What are your dreams for the world (or Bartlesville) for the year 2050 (about 30 years from now)? And what are your dreams for how DCC will help us get there? Give yourself permission to spend time sitting with your dreams and listening to what your heart is telling you. If you have a little voice inside you that tells you dreaming is a waste of time, tell it to pipe down for a bit.

There are no right dreams or wrong dreams. Your dreams are your dreams. And we need to hear everyone's dreams so that we can find our collective dream. A plethora of dreams invites a new world of possibilities, especially when the dreamers are committed to a world that prioritizes the common good. Each of us — and each of our dreams — has a role to play.

Whenever I think about dreams, I can't help but think about dream catchers. In some indigenous communities, dream catchers, made of willow twigs and webs of

¹ <https://enfleshed.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/May28Subs.pdf>, accessed 5/26/23.

sinew, were hung from the cradle board to keep illness, evil spirits, and bad dreams away from the baby. I don't know that we need a dream catcher right now, but I do think we need dream collectors. This summer, you will collect bits and pieces of your dreams. I hope, when I come back in the fall, you will share your dreams for the future with me and I will look forward to sharing mine with you. Then together, we will dream a dream for DCC in the next season.

Through the "Winds of Change" sermon series, we will see that the winds of change blowing in the stories of our ancestors are still blowing today. I don't think it's a coincidence that in Hebrew the same word, ruach, that is used for wind is also used for spirit. The Spirit of change is blowing. The Pentecost story reminds us that the Sacred Spirit will not be contained or made small. The Spirit is loose in this world and resides in you and in me. She has already planted seeds of big dreams in our hearts. What is she saying to you? What is she saying to us? Dreams big dreams, dear ones. Amen.