

St James United Church



Message for May 19, 2024 Pentecost Sunday

“From Dreams to Visions” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft
Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-26 and 16:4-159-17; “Pentecost” by Malcolm Guite

On that first Pentecost, Peter says that the words of the prophet Joel were fulfilled and so through God's Spirit, younger people had visions and older people dreamed dreams. Praying in that same Holy Spirit, I invite you to close your eyes. Come to stillness as you breathe a few grounding breaths, asking for God's Spirit to be with you now as all those centuries ago.... Cast your mind to what you most long for, not at a surface level, but imaging what you truly yearn for in the depth of your heart. *(Pause)*... Do you see it? Now picture what you most wish for your family, again not at surface level but truly, deeply hope for them. Hold that before you. *(Pause)*... Again, inviting the Spirit to be with you, extend your thoughts out to this faith community. What is your vision for this congregation, for us as a people seeking to live Christ's way? *(Pause)*... And extending a larger circle, what about the wider community? *(Pause)*... And our world? *(Pause)*... What is the world you envision for your children, grandchildren, their children. *(Pause)*

At that deep heart level, what were you picturing?... *(Pause to let people share their dreams.)* Like mine your dreams were value based. I pictured things, but as a way to express something less concrete. Like as I cast a vision for St. John's I saw a shared vegetable garden in the centre of a housing complex, suggesting living collaboratively and sustainably, or for the world I pictured a very large table where people of many different nations shared a meal. Did you find they were connected, not wanting one value, one circumstance for yourself, but something completely different to that for your family and different again for the world that will be inherited by your grandchildren? That says a lot I think, that as people we have fundamental yearnings for everyone as a whole.

That makes sense to me because in the end those dreams at the heart of our hearts aren't ours but God's, the Spirit whispering to us. The most basic word the Spirit speaks to our hearts is love, and from there our other dreams, perhaps for healing, letting go of a past hurt, extending compassion, living in peace, sharing spaces with others, flow from that one claim on us. I think that's why Acts 2 opens as it does with the Spirit dividing into tongues of flame for each of Jesus' disciples. Each of them is filled with God's grace, come to know how God sees them, loves them, not for what they have or do but simply are, made in God's image and joined to others in the same way. It's only then they can speak in a way that everyone can understand. The love they

know individually enables them to love the people outside their door and so speak in their languages, that is to affirm them for who they are, and the dreams they hold in their hearts.

As I shared a couple of Sundays ago, that's our call as a Christian community, to be a spiritual family, embodying in our sharing together God's vision for us, and not just as individuals but the world, what Jesus calls God's Reign or God's Commonwealth. Each of the dreams, our heart's yearnings, that we pictured a few moments is a part of that, a way in which we help live into that in our own lives. And it doesn't need to be just a dream, something that we hope for, but doubt will ever be, but instead it can be a vision. The difference between dreams and visions is really a matter of action. A vision is something that can become a reality when we take steps toward it, especially when we do so collectively.

The key I think, is that we need to do it not just as fellow humans but with hearts open to what God is doing with us through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus tells us in our reading from John's gospel, he had to leave so he could send the Spirit as Advocate to help us live into God's Commonwealth. To do this the Spirit leads us into all truth, deeper than what we think we know, but a profound heart knowledge connecting us to each other. This truth takes time to experience, which is why most of what we pictured in our minds seems more of a dream than a vision, shaped as we are by how the world thinks, much of that pulling us from God's Commonwealth not toward it. Thankfully through our lives the Spirit helps us see things differently, and not just individually but as a church. Think of something you were convinced of when you were younger. What changed your mind? I doubt it was someone arguing with you. That likely strengthened it. But in time you grew, not from people debating with you but when you met heart to heart and learned from each other, you feeling heard and them too, each speaking and being understood. It is in these relationships that the Advocate works, loving us, loving the other person, and in the sharing between us leading us to a fuller truth.

That is the gift of being church. We are a diverse body of people with many ideas, coming from different places, backgrounds, stages of life. But through our differences, and our likenesses, the Spirit teaches us the deep truths that draw us into God's Commonwealth, God's vision. And your initial dreams are part of that. I invite you to bring one to mind again. Do you see it? It can become a vision that we work toward, made possible when we share our dreams with others, discover folks who will walk with us, together part of God's larger vision for us all, hearts connected by the deep truth of God's love for each and every one of us. So, as we celebrate Pentecost, let us do so from the depths of our dreams, our visions, in the knowledge that the Spirit working with us. Amen.