

## "SEEING VISIONS AND DREAMING DREAMS"

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### Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

John 14:8-17, 25-27

Back in the earliest part of the twentieth century, there lived a man by the name of Roald Amundsen. Somebody here may recognize his name, because he was the man who discovered both the North and South Poles - the South Pole in 1911 and the North Pole in 1926. Amundsen was Norwegian, and he was a voracious explorer - exploring many more places than just the Poles in his lifetime. He was also a family man.

The story has been told that, on one of those long trips that he went on exploring the world, this one to the North Pole, he took along with him a homing pigeon. When he finally made it to the Pole, he reached inside the cage and set the bird free. And indeed, the bird went home - back to Amundsen's home - where his wife, always a little worried about the well-being of her husband on these dangerous treks, was no doubt thrilled, to know that he was indeed alive and well and, literally, on top of the world!

(On-line, MinistryMatters.com)

Well, in much the same way, the disciples of Christ were thrilled when the Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost, because they knew then, that Jesus' promises were true, and that He was alive and well, and present in the Spirit whom He had promised would be with them. You heard of that promise in the Gospel lesson that was just read. Jesus told them that after He was gone the Spirit would be with them, and through the power of that Spirit they could do anything - more than they could imagine.

And boy, did the Spirit come - in a powerful way. You heard Bethany read it. The Spirit swept in like the rush of a mighty wind, and tongues as of fire descended, and people understand the Word of God even though they spoke a bunch of different languages. Everybody heard and understood.

The Spirit swept so powerfully through the people there that day that, the scripture says, 3000 of them were convicted, and bowed down before Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and thus, the community of faith, which we now call the church, was born. It was an incredible day - the Day of Pentecost.

And, if we're not careful, we can celebrate it as just that - a day - a day to

remember what happened way back then. But Pentecost is more than just one day in time - Pentecost is whenever God's Spirit is poured out and sweeps over us, and stirs us up, and makes things happen. Pentecost happens all the time.

One pastor said that he sees "the people I'm around continuing the story that started so long ago by sharing their faith, living with confidence, claiming the power of God in their lives, reaching out in mercy and love to those around them, and more. I see them, that is, as the Church that continues to be created anew by the Spirit." (On-line, WorkingPreacher.com, Rev. David Lose)

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit who was in the creation of the universe, the Spirit who descended on Pentecost and touched those 3000 lives, is the Spirit who is with us even now, and who empowers us to do mighty things, as Jesus promised in the Gospel lesson.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, could tell us about what the Holy Spirit can do and, in fact, did with him. For those of you who don't know, John Wesley was one of the many children born to Susannah and Samuel Wesley. Samuel was an Anglican preacher, and sons John and Charles both went on to become Anglican preachers themselves. And things were going along pretty well for them, but John, particularly, got into a rut. Frankly, the Anglican Church of his day was in a rut as well.

But one day, May 24, 1738 to be exact, the Spirit swept over him and changed his life. It wasn't dramatic, like the events of the Day of Pentecost. No, actually it might have seemed quite mundane. He was in a prayer service at a building on Aldersgate Street in London and he heard someone reading from Martin Luther's Preface to the Book of Romans.

Listen to what happened next in his own words from his journal: "About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Wesley's life was never the same again. Mind you, this experience happened long after he became a priest and was in ministry. It happened in God's time and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and from that moment on, John Wesley was on fire. As a matter of fact, he was quoted once as saying, that he "would light himself on fire with passion and people would come from miles to watch him burn."

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, John Wesley started this movement called Methodism. He never intended for it to be a denomination, but the Spirit apparently thought otherwise, because after Wesley sent missionary preachers to

America, Methodism swept across the colonies, and then grew as the country grew, until today, there are over 8 million Methodists in this country and more than 12 million around the world.

Who knew, that in a meeting house in London, during a routine Bible study, a spark would be lit that touches us even 275 years later? God did when His Spirit blew into John Wesley's heart that night.

It was a Pentecost moment!

Let me tell you about another Pentecost moment - a very different one. It happened in the life of a man whose nickname was Hap. Hap was a good guy, at least by outward appearances. He was a lawyer who did great work in the legal community. He was a church member, and well thought of there as well. From all outward appearances, he had it all together.

Except there was another side to Hap. He was an alcoholic as well. He knew he drank too much but he really thought he was handling it, until one day, when he was drunk, he got on a plane, a private plane, flew to Chicago to watch a Bears football game, flew home, and later on, had absolutely no recollection of doing any of it. He only knew he had done it when charges showed up on his credit card bill.

Hap says, "That was the turning point. When I realized that I could make a trip like that and not remember anything about it, it suddenly dawned on me that I was an alcoholic and totally out of control. I turned to Alcoholics Anonymous for help. I also turned to God."

And when he did, the Holy Spirit poured over him, and he became a new man. He never took another drink for the rest of his life. He also spoke to whatever groups wanted him about his life as an alcoholic and that fateful trip to Chicago, and how God had restored him and helped him start over.

And he always ended by telling them about his prayer that he prayed every single morning of his life. It went like this: "Father, I cannot face this day without you. I cannot handle my life without you. I cannot keep from drinking today without you. Send me your Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to guide me and lead me through this day."

(On-line, SermonSuite.com, "Hazel, Hap and the Shalom of God,"  
Ron Lavin)

That day, that awful day when Hap knew what he had done, was also a day of new beginnings for him, a day of Pentecost, when God's Spirit poured over him and made him new.

That's how God's Spirit works, and as the Spirit works in lives of individuals, so too does the Spirit pour out on churches as well with Pentecost moments. And we can surely testify to that.

How many times have things happened here that might have seemed impossible to imagine? How many times have we seen visions and dreamed dreams and did what the Spirit led us to do, even when it didn't make sense? How many times have we seen changed lives and new beginnings? Oh, how many Pentecost moments we have witnessed!

I mean, who would have thought that we could build a big, beautiful addition to our church in the midst of a recession? The Spirit led us to do that, and that big, beautiful addition is already full!

And who could have imagined that when we had the daring idea to take our summer Bible study outside of the church last summer instead of having it in a classroom here, that over 50 people would take part? The Spirit.

And who would have thought that in a day when the media is trumpeting how churches are dying, and we're becoming a secular society, we, here in this church are dealing with things like having a choir who sometimes overflows the choir loft, and adding a whole new worship service for a new generation, and witnessing these wonderful young people joining even today? Who? The Holy Spirit.

As Jesus said in today's Gospel lesson, "those who believe in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will they do." Anything is possible when the Holy Spirit sweeps in and empowers us. Anything.

And that's, particularly, what I want the confirmants to hear today. God, through the power of His Holy Spirit, can sweep into your life at any moment, stirring up in you a desire to do something. And when He does, do it. You have the potential to see visions and dream dreams - and to do amazing things with your life. Most of all, you have the potential to touch the world with the love of Christ. I don't know how you'll do it just now, and maybe you don't either, but God does.

What you need to do is, like Hap, the man I told you about earlier, just pray and be open to God's leading in your life. That's goes for everybody here, not just the confirmants. The wind of the Holy Spirit blows where it will, but we all have a choice - to let it sweep over us, and in us and through us, or to squelch it and say no. Oh, that we would always say yes.

I want to close with one final thought. Someone has said that "what

happened to Peter on Pentecost can happen to us . . . On the night of the crucifixion, it was Peter near the fire. He followed afar off and warmed himself by the fire. Then it was Peter in the fire when he failed to live up to his boast and denied his Lord and got into trouble. But on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter on fire, empowered by the Holy Spirit to courageous witness. And we are told that what happened to Peter happened to all the disciples. And indeed, it can happen to us.” (On-line, “We’ve Got Spirit, Yes We Do!, Rev. Dr. Hal Brady)

Indeed, it can happen to us, if we'll be open to the movement of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. So may we be open, for when we are, we too can see visions, dream dreams and amazing, amazing things can happen!

Thanks be to God!

Amen