

Re-Imagined in the Spirit

Acts 2: 1-4

Out of the scriptures this morning comes a seminal text about the sending of the Holy Spirit to God's people. I'll be reading from Acts 2:1-4, as we see the original group of Christians gathered in Jerusalem to receive this amazing gift.

Read Acts 2:1-4. Pray. Macy sings.

The human imagination is an amazing thing. Imagination has brought humankind through the Dark Ages to its present state of advanced civilization. Imagination led Columbus to discover America. Imagination led Ben Franklin to discover electricity. Imagination has given us the steam engine, the telephone, the phonograph, the automobile, the computer and the 3D printer, for these things had to be imagined before they became realities. Albert Einstein, one of the greatest thinkers and innovators of all time, said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." I think what he meant is that you can have all the book knowledge in the world, but if you don't have a vision of what to do with it, you're still stuck on the pages of the book.

And for Christian people, followers of Jesus Christ, that's where the Holy Spirit comes in. Surely, the imagination is the work of the Holy Spirit, the one who resides with us and who inspires us to carry out God's redemptive work in the world. With the help and power of the Holy Spirit, imagination can easily lead to the betterment of the world and the advancement of God's purposes.

In our scripture passage for today, we see Jesus' followers gathered together after he has ascended into heaven and seemingly left them high and dry. So they wait around in Jerusalem for a few days to see what shakes out. Jesus has given them a mandate best articulated in the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus told them, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." So, there they are in Jerusalem, without Jesus, not knowing what the future holds, with instructions to travel the world and spread the gospel. No big deal, right? Just a tiny little task, a very small "to do" list. A bunch of guys sitting around, with huge mandate in front of them, without the slightest clue as to how to accomplish it. They have no money, they have no building to work out of, they have little resources among them, but a huge, monumental task ahead of them. Travel the world;

spread the gospel. (*Sounds like a little band of faithful Presbyterians from Peters Creek Church, doesn't it?*)

But God doesn't desert them-no, God provides for them with a little helper we like to call the Holy Spirit, **AND** their God-given imaginations.

In the end, this small band of disciples, along with others who have been following Jesus as well, create the Christian Church, the Universal Christian Church, an organization that today, despite our recent losses, boasts more than 2 billion members. And even though the exact wealth of, say the Roman Catholic Church, is impossible to accurately calculate, there is no doubt, that between the Catholic Church's priceless art, land, gold and investments across the globe, it is one of the wealthiest institutions on Earth. Lots of followers, lots of wealth, lasts over 2,000 years, not bad for a group of rag tag disciples. How did they accomplish this extraordinary feat? With the help of their imaginations and the Holy Spirit.

As human beings, we are faced with problems all the time. As the Church of Jesus Christ, we are faced with problems all the time: We have a decreasing group of people in the United States who put God first in their lives; we have the huge growth of the "nones," in society – those folks who say they have no religious affiliation; we have whole generations of kids who are growing up without any basis in Biblical knowledge and without any idea that Jesus loves them. Then there are the social ills like extreme poverty in this country that we are called to eliminate; we have things like drug addiction and homelessness and crime everywhere you look. In truth, we are also just a rag tag band of disciples with little resources and a huge mandate from God – spread the gospel! Get together everything you have and spread the gospel!!

Well, my friends, it is Pentecost Sunday and I am here to tell you that we can use our imaginations along with the Holy Spirit to confront these issues that the church faces today. How do we start? We start by imagining. Macy just sang "Pure Imagination" from the classic movie "Willy Wonk and the Chocolate Factory." She sang, "*If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it. Anything you want to, do it. Wanna change the world, there's nothing to it . . .*" My friends, I don't mean to frighten you, but Jesus asks us to change the world, starting right here in Washington County.

So, let's take the advice of the song for just a few moments, let's imagine a few of the issues faced by us here today, and let's consider how we can use our imaginations to create a more

gospel filled world. Let's imagine, just for moment, let's stop and picture it in our minds, that no child in Washington County would go hungry this summer.

Most of you know that during the school year, children whose families are at or below the poverty level, can receive a free lunch at school. But, you know, school will be over in just a few weeks and those children will have no free lunch provided for them by caring hands. Their stomachs will still growl and their situation in poverty will remain the same, but lunch will not be available. Last summer, the Washington School District decided to continue the free lunch program during the summer by offering lunch at Wash High, pretty good solution, don't you think? The problem was that no one came. The problem was that little kids whose tummies are growling don't drive and can't get themselves to Wash High.

Enter into this perplexing picture Joyce Ellis from the LeMoyne Center, who has a heart for children, a very close connection with the Holy Spirit, and a huge imagination! "If the children can't get to the lunches" imagined Joyce, "we'll bring the lunches to the children!" And so began her efforts to create the mobile lunch program for Washington. The Church of the Covenant signed up 23 volunteers last week to help with this effort. Thank you. Dennis Myers is going to help led this effort by getting our kitchen organized, and we will be in on the front lines of feeding children. "If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it" This summer, hundreds of children will be fed on an ongoing basis due to Joyce, the Holy Spirit and a vivid imagination.

Let's imagine for just a moment, the Peters Creek Church over on Brookwood Road in Peters Township, that just re-joined the PCUSA after years of being in legal limbo. Let's imagine that the legal wrangling for the building and the resources is over, let's imagine God's Spirit leading the way into a bright new future for that church, let's imagine Peters Creek rising from the ashes once again. Sure, it used to be this and it used to be that, but what is the Holy Spirit imaging for Peters Creek right now, in 2015? What picture of a brand new church can we imagine together, that appeals to the new families of our day, to the busy life-styles that people have, to the desperate need for the love of Jesus Christ that people always have in their hearts? The new Peters Creek will be a brand new creation, rising from the ashes of litigation, re-imagined in the power of the Holy Spirit. A brand new creation to spread the gospel in Washington County. Let's imagine.

And on an even bigger scale, let's imagine that the Presbyterian Church USA, despite the losses in membership and the huge decrease in church going people in general, can re-imagine

itself into a group that does church differently in 2015. A group that shifts from an inward-focused, membership maintenance model of church to a more outward-focused, creative, and disciple-making model. This is happening right before our very eyes in this country as the PCUSA's 1001 New Worshipping Communities program is growing and expanding with the help of the Holy Spirit and powerful imagination.

Currently, 276 NWC representing 113 presbyteries have come to life, with each one looking very different from the typical church model. Some of them meet in churches, but others meet in homes, coffee shops, schools, restaurants and libraries. And here's the kicker – 52% of the members of NWC are under age 39! And 53% are from racial ethnic communities. How do they do that? How are they reaching these hard to reach groups? With the help of the Holy Spirit and great imaginations. ***Friends, we are not part of dying denomination; we are part of a denomination that is re-imagining itself in the power of the Holy Spirit for 2015 and beyond. Let's imagine.***

I want you all to leave here today, my friends, with the knowledge and the certainty that Pentecost is not a unique event from a long time ago, but a gift of the Holy Spirit for God's people today in Washington County. We have a huge task in front of us, a mandate to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us." It's a tall order, but we are aided and led by the power of the Holy Spirit and our God-given imaginations that will not let us fail. Friends, believe in the power that is given to you by God - re-imagine what you see into the paradise that God sees. Praise be to God. Amen.