

## **Sermon Preached on June 5, 2022 – The Day of Pentecost**

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Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17, 25-27

### **Pentecost Dreams and Visions**

I Have a Dream, a song to sing  
To help me cope, with anything  
If you see the wonder, of a fairy tale  
You can take the future, even if you fail  
I believe in angels  
Something good in everything I see  
I believe in angels  
When I know the time is right for me  
I'll cross the stream, I Have a Dream

The holy gospel according to ABBA, one of my Swedish ancestors' great oracles.

"I have a dream."

"I will pour out my Spirit upon all people, and your children shall prophesy, and your young shall see visions, and your elders shall dream dreams." from today's reading from Acts.

"I have a dream."

There have been dreamers in our world since the beginning of time.

In the Hebrew Bible, they're often called Prophets.

Throughout history, we look to them as visionaries.

In our current time, we think of them as delusional and out of touch with reality.

It's a strange thing how that works.

With the perspective of time, dreamers come to take on an air of wisdom, thoughtfulness, heroes even.

Dr King's dream speech is probably one of the most well-known but, I'm guessing to many at the time people thought he was out of his mind.

How would it ever be possible for people of all skin colors and backgrounds to come together, to be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin?

We're not "there" yet by any stretch of the imagination, as the horrific massacre in Buffalo reminds us, and yet we look back on Dr. King's speech and say, "he was right, there *will* be a time."

June is Pride month, and we know that there were previous decades and centuries when the idea that queer identities would be welcomed, never mind celebrated for a month, was unheard of.

Pride month is celebrated in June as a commemoration of the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1968 when queer folks, led by black queer and trans activists, stood up to the New York City Police after they raided a well-known gay bar, the Stonewall Inn.

Those activists didn't envision a pride month full of parades and rainbow flags, and I'm sure they *never* imagined the kind of corporate sponsorships New York City Pride would end up having.

But dreamers like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera did dream of a time when queer people, especially queer trans people of color, would be safe, would be welcomed into society, would be welcomed in the church.

Marsha and Sylvia were not considered "visionaries" in their day, they were vilified and abused by society.

But, in 2022 we can see them for the incredible dreamers that they were.

It's not often, when listing the gifts of the Spirit, that we think about dreams or visions.

Most often, we think of things like wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues as is outlined in 1 Corinthians.

But, this morning, in Acts, dreams and visions are revealed as spiritual gifts: After what sounds like an earthquake – that sound of a train coming right in your window – and the disciples are given the ability to speak all different languages, and the crowd is gobsmacked, Peter gets up and says "these men aren't drunk as you suppose, this is the fulfillment of what was said in Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'"

Dreams and visions are gifts of the poured-out Spirit, and while they may not seem as practical as other tangible gifts like healing or interpreting tongues, they are so so necessary.

A few years ago, Diana Butler Bass, an American historian of Christianity and an advocate for progressive Christianity, was the guest speaker at a clergy gathering I attended.

One of her books that really brought her into the spotlight is called "Christianity after Religion" – in it she talks a bit about the decline of Christendom – the idea that everyone and everything can no longer be assumed to be Christian or connected to Christianity as was perhaps the case, especially in the West, for the last few centuries.

At this conference, she talked about how this decline of Christendom is coupled with the decline in church attendance and has contributed to the narrative of "the church is dying."

"The church isn't like it was before." "When I was younger we had 50 kids in our Sunday School." "You know, in my day we prioritized going to church on Sunday mornings"...you've heard and perhaps even told one of these stories before.

Butler Bass talked about how for the most part the narrative around Christianity has been that of a "utopian arc" – if you think of history as these waves of ups and downs, Christianity had a long "up": Jesus died (that was the bottom) but then he rose from the dead and the disciples took on the ministry and everything has just been on the up and up since then!

The view from the top was beautiful.

But, the narrative of the church for the past 20 years or so has been that of a “dystopian arc” – we’re in the downswing.

Attendance is dropping, budgets are diminishing, did you know there are sports games played on Sunday mornings now? You can even go to the mall on a Sunday!

The narrative is one of challenge.

Diana noted that when you’re at the bottom – or on your way down – it’s really hard to know how to get out of it.

And the greatest temptation when you can’t see a path forward is to try to go back up the other side: another word for this is “nostalgia.”

“Gosh, wasn’t it better when...” “wouldn’t it be great if we could just go back to...” “make America...” nevermind, I won’t go there this time, but you get what I mean.

We know what it looked like before, we have no idea what it will look like in the future.

So, what did Butler Bass suggest?

We need dreamers! We need visionaries! We need bridge builders!

We need our children to prophesy, our young to see visions, and our elders to dream dreams.

We need possibility models to give us something to strive for – we need a vision of hope that motivates us to act.

“I have a dream!”

We can’t go back!

We literally can’t go back in time, but also one of the things she points out about nostalgia is it’s a romanticized version of what was.

We don’t look back and say “gee, I wish I could go back to the good times AND the hard times” – it’s usually only the good we remember.

And, it’s a skewed good.

In this month of Pride, my community is constantly reminding ourselves that Pride started as a riot not a parade, because being queer was NOT welcome.

I do not want to go back to that.

Dr. King’s speech has not been realized, and I would imagine very few of our Black siblings would wish to go back in time in this country.

Going backwards is NOT the option.

We go forward, we go up – and it is our dreamers and visionaries who help us get there.

We need dreamers in the church! We need dreamers in society!

We need a vision for ending gun violence! We need a vision for dismantling racism!

And remember, when the disciples had the infusion of the Spirit, when the Spirit descended on them in that whirlwind and gave them the gifts to do and see and believe what they never thought they could? What was the community's reaction?

Some said "wow!" others said "they're drunk!"

Humanity is quick to judge and tear down what God has deemed divine.

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Where are those dreamers? Where are those visionaries?

We need to look to the margins, the outcasts, the ones who because of their status as "other" aren't listened to or taken seriously.

It's the "outrageous!" or the "that will never happen" that we need to listen to.

It's the "how could they think that" and the "oh, once they're older they'll see" who will actually be our teachers.

It's the transformation of heart and learning that you didn't know you were capable of that will help us get there.

It's the Holy Spirit working her way through our communities if we just open ourselves to perceiving her.

I Have a Dream, a fantasy  
To help me through, reality  
And my destination, makes it worth the while  
Pushin' through the darkness, still another mile  
I believe in angels  
Something good in everything I see  
I believe in angels  
When I know the time is right for me  
I'll cross the stream, I Have a Dream  
I'll cross the stream, I Have a Dream