

June 4, 2017
Acts 2:1-18
Pastor Rosanna McFadden
Creekside COB

“Envision Possibility”

Good morning! I LOVE Pentecost Sunday. I’ve have been especially looking forward to it this year because this Sunday is the intersection of several things which are especially exciting to me. First, this fabric on the worship table. The red with the gold embroidery and the orange silk were brought to us from India by Todd Zerbe. I’ve been waiting to use them for months. I’m eager to discover other possibilities for using them, but they are especially appropriate for Pentecost, when we remember the tongues of fire which rested on the heads of the first apostles. That same Spirit of God is among us today. Beautiful fabric from around the world reminds me that the Spirit is greater than any nation or any denomination. God’s Spirit is alive in the beauty of every culture, if we find the right way to express it.

Other threads which I hope to weave into the service today are vision, prophecy, imagination, and possibility -- with maybe a little graduation thrown in there. I’m sure I can do it, with the help of the Spirit and these words from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Let’s begin there.

Many of you have heard the story of the day of Pentecost. Some of you will also recognize the root word “pente” which means 5: as in pentagram, a five –sided figure. In this case, the pente means fifty -- Pentecost was a Jewish holiday which came fifty days after Passover. Since Christian Easter is coordinated to fall on the same week as Passover, Pentecost is 49 days -- 7 weeks -- after Easter. This means it always comes toward the end of May or early June: right at the end of the school year and the beginning of summer; a season ripe with possibility and promise.

The vision and prophecy part are pretty easy to find -- right in verse 17, our friend Peter stands up and quotes the prophet Joel, who talked about the Spirit of the Lord being poured out on all flesh and young men seeing visions and old men dreaming dreams. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible, folks like Joel and Isaiah and Jeremiah were the vision-keepers of the Jewish people. The prophets were revered and sometimes reviled because God's vision was shared through them. Sometimes it was a positive vision of hope and encouragement, like the words of Jeremiah 29:11 when God says to the exiles in Babylon, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." Sometimes it was a negative vision of what would happen to the people if they did not repent and change their ways. Either way, it was the prophets who communicated God's vision to the people.

John the Baptist, and especially Jesus Christ are the New Testament heirs of that tradition of prophecy. The gospels tell us of John preparing the way of the Lord in the wilderness, and Jesus' teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God. Remember last week, after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples gather to ask him if now is the time when he will restore the kingdom. Jesus didn't tell them the time, but he promised that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. This is the day we remember when that promise happened. And notice how the promise opens up the possibility of vision: it's no longer just for a few selected prophets who will communicate the vision of God, *everyone -- all flesh --* can receive the power and vision of God's Spirit: sons and daughters, young men, old men, slaves and free people, even women. Incredible. Part of the power of Pentecost is that we are all entrusted to be keepers and speakers of God's vision. And just to be sure that *everyone* gets this message, God allows each person gathered in Jerusalem that day, wherever they are from, to hear the message from God's Spirit in their own language.

So if we are all -- young and old, slave and free, women and men -- part of sharing God's vision, I have two questions: 1. How are we doing? 2. How are we doing it? Let's make this a little easier for ourselves, and not try to tackle God's vision for the whole world, God's vision for our country, or even God's vision for Elkhart County. Those may all be relevant to our answers, but let's start with God's

vision for Creekside Church. What is that? If you're quick on the uptake and you looked above the doors to the Worship Center when you came in today, you might be able to quote me Creekside's vision statement. Can anybody do that? Excellent. You get bonus points for the day. Having a vision statement suggests that we have a vision, but that's just the beginning of a process which should be constantly in motion. If this is our vision -- this rooted, growing, bearing fruit thing--what does that mean? How do we keep communicating this vision in ways that people can understand in their own language? Is that language visual, digital, relational -- all of the above? We've been having conversation over the past few months at Church Board and with the media center about a social media policy for Creekside. Ten years ago that conversation wouldn't have made any sense, but now it's a necessity. If we're going to start speaking new languages, we need to be sure we understand how to say it, and that what we're saying is consistent with our vision for Creekside.

But speaking is just the beginning. Our vision statement is only meaningful if we embody what it says. I believe the work of living into our vision begins with imagination -- the power of the Spirit which enables us to see visions and dream dreams. Do you remember this from last week? [Speak Possibility logo slide] These are tools which we can use to speak possibility. What we speak about determines what we focus on. What we focus on determines what we imagine. What we imagine determines what we do. What we do determines our future. Imagination is the forerunner of vision. When we imagine possibility for ourselves or our church, and pray about where God wants us to be, we begin to construct and vision and work toward that vision together. We still need lots of individuals and lots of different gifts and talents, but we need to harness that energy in the service of a shared vision. If we're not going in the same direction, if those great ideas and energy are pulling us in different directions, then we're pulling hard and going no where.

I'm going to keep encouraging you to stay for lunch next week -- I shouldn't have to ask twice when you know what good food our fellowship team provides -- and to see the video that the Church Board is sponsoring. It's a video on leadership with Ben Zander, the conductor of the Boston Pops orchestra, and he is one of the most

enthusiastic individuals I have ever seen. You don't have to be a musician to appreciate his message. It's an entertaining and inspiring video, but mostly I want it to be a springboard for the Table Talks which will happen in June and July, when we'll get to hear about the work and the vision of Creekside's ministry teams. This will be an opportunity for you to listen, but also to imagine and speak possibility to the folks who serve in different ministries in behalf of our church. This will be a time for all of us to affirm and express appreciation for what is working here at Creekside, and to envision how we can coordinate the gifts that our leaders and our teams share with our church. My hope is that through these summer months we can get a clearer picture and sharper vision of how to live into God's mission at Creekside. That imagination can lead us into action, can lead us to the future where God is calling. I encourage you to keep speaking and envisioning possibilities for Creekside.

I want to give you an example, and I hope this won't embarrass anyone. Those of you who were here on May 7, Youth Sunday, heard our graduating seniors Tia Marcin and Chris Harney share their plans for the future. Tia will start college at IUPUI, studying to be an OB/GYN. Chris has already passed a series of tests to be certified as an EMT, and is planning to continue studying to become a paramedic. I don't know how many of the other hundreds of students graduating this year are conscious of God's direction in their lives, but I see God's handprints all over these two. I believe in the God who told Jeremiah that "I know the plans I have for you; plans for your welfare, to give you a future with hope." God's plans need our imagination and our cooperation in order to flourish. God may have given Tia the vision to be a physician, but she will have to make the plans to go to college and take a LOT of science classes in order to make that happen. Chris has had to do practical training and take weekend time to go on ambulance runs. No vision worth achieving is something we do by ourselves. We celebrate graduates and their work, but know that it is the support of their families and mentors and friends which gives them the possibility of the future they imagine. We know that God holds the future and has great plans for them. When we want what God wants for us, our plans are sure to prosper.

That is the gift -- not just for graduation, but every day -- which we can give to one another. To encourage their dreams, to cultivate their

vision, to keep speaking the language of possibility about what we can do together. The same Spirit of the Lord which moved over the face of the waters in creation and inspired the prophets with the word of God and rested on Jesus Christ when he began his ministry in Nazareth and added three thousand members to the church on Pentecost -- that same Spirit has been poured out upon us today, and will continue to guide the vision of this church. Blessings to our graduates, and to all of you who dream dreams and see visions of the kingdom of God. Keep dreaming, keep walking, keep envisioning the possibilities that God has for us: the Spirit of the Lord is upon you. And all God's people said, Amen!