

HIS ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD REJOICED THAT HE HAD BECOME A BELIEVER IN GOD

Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104, Romans 8:14-17, John 14:8-17

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson
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Pentecost Sunday, June 3, 2001, 8:15 a.m. service

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Look at the Rose Window! Notice the dive-bombing bird. That bird is a dove, a muscular dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven to empower us. Look at the window again. Notice also the seven tongues of beautiful ^{yellow to blue} ~~ruby red~~ fire. They remind us that the Holy Spirit descended on the heads of the early Christians in the form of tongues of fire. *enabling them to see visions & dream dreams*

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost comes fifty days after Easter. Pentecost was a Jewish holiday celebrating the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Jews from throughout the Roman world came annually to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. On the first Christian Pentecost the early Christians hid behind closed doors without a clue as to what to do next. They knew Jesus was alive. They knew he'd risen from the dead. They knew he'd conquered death. They knew he'd given them the mission of taking the good news of his death and resurrection to all people everywhere. They knew, but, like so many Presbyterians, they were tongue-tied. They were shy. They were reserved. And, mostly they were afraid. But something wonderful happened. God poured out his Holy Spirit on them enabling them to speak, encouraging them to obey, empowering them to preach.

The Spirit came with the sound of mighty rushing wind. I imagine it was like the sound of the tornado that roared through southern Lancaster county several years ago. The Spirit also came as tongues of fire resting on the heads of the early Christians. What a strange event. Christians started talking about Jesus and people understood. There were basically two reactions to what happened. The rationalists looked for a logical explanation – they're all drunk. But others were amazed and glorified God. The apostle Peter jumped on a platform and explained, "God is fulfilling ancient prophecy." The prophet Joel had prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. One thing the Old Testament prophet Joel had said is, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

The Holy Spirit empowers us, enables
~~God wants~~ us to have visions and dream dreams. Two years ago I attended an Alban Institute Seminar entitled *New Visions for the Long Pastorate*. Most church leaders agree that longer pastorates make for

healthier ministries. Yet the practical skills needed by ministers to continue in ministry at the same location for many years are often lacking. The average length of a pastorate is 5 years. Of the thirty pastors at the conference only five had been at their churches longer than I've been your pastor. In the twentieth century, only one pastor, Pastor Russell, was here longer than I've been. I came away from the conference with a renewed vision for my ministry at Oxford Presbyterian Church. I began to dream a future for our church. Research done by the Alban Institute shows that pastors are most successful if periodically they take a sabbatical to renew their vision and energy for their parish. Farmers use to leave a field fallow for a year. Repeated plantings on the same plot of ground, before the entrance of fertilizers, depleted the soil. So a field would lie fallow for a year. Farmers wouldn't plow it. They discovered that by letting land lie fallow periodically the soil became all the more productive. My hope is that my three-month sabbatical will make me more productive when I return.

God declared through the prophet Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your old men shall dream dreams." When I was very young I thought anybody who was an adult was old. A twenty-year old adult was old. In my twenties, back in the sixties, friends would say, "Never trust anyone over thirty." Why? They were old. Old people don't understand. When I was in my thirties I visited a couple, members of my church in Buffalo, NY. I asked them how old their son was. Their son was in his forties. I thought, "That's really old." Now I'm 56 years old. I don't feel old, but many of you younger people probably think I'm an old man. How old do you have to be in order to be old?

Don Drennen tells the story about his dad, old Mister Lawrence Drennen who lived to be almost a hundred. He walked to work and church well into his nineties. He vacationed in Florida once and when he got back home he was asked, "Wouldn't you like to retire to Florida?" And he answered, "I don't want to go down there with all those old people." He was in his nineties. I guess whether you're old or young depends on your frame of mind. Some people feel they're too old to dream dreams. Not old Mr. Drennen. He dreamed of seeing our sanctuary completed when he was 98 years old. He never stopped dreaming.

Do you dream? Some people have stopped dreaming. I know teenagers who have stopped dreaming. They have no dream for the future - not even for their own future. Some people's dreams have turned to nightmares. They don't want to go to sleep anymore because they're haunted by bad dreams. They wonder if the tragedy they've experienced is simply a bad dream. Dreams can be dashed. It's a horrible thing for our dreams to be destroyed, more painful than being tortured. Some people have stopped dreaming. They dare not dream again. They're afraid to dream. God wants us to dream dreams no matter how old or young we are because God has a wonderful purpose for each one of us and for our families and for our world.

I'd like to come back in September and share with you my dreams for our church. In the year 2004 we'll celebrate our 250th anniversary as a church. When we celebrated our ~~150~~¹⁰⁰th anniversary, Dr. John Miller Dickey was our pastor. He was called to the church when he was 26 years old. He remained pastor of the church until he was fifty years old, an age some would consider old. Near the end of his pastorate he dreamed of a college that would educate African Americans and train them to be Presbyterian Ministers and Missionaries. Our church celebrated its 100th anniversary by establishing Lincoln University, the oldest historically Black college in the world. John Miller Dickey never stopped dreaming.

I don't want to stop dreaming either. I want to come back in September to lead the congregation in dreaming dreams for our 250th anniversary. I don't want to impose my dreams on you. I want you to dream. I want our young people to prophesy -- tell us what you see. I want to hear their visions for themselves, for the town, for the church. I want to encourage old men and women like me to dream dreams of God's future. One of the best inspirations for our dreams and visions can be found in the Bible -- the vision and dreams prophets had of world where God rules, where love triumphs over hatred, and good over evil, and right over wrong. Come Holy Spirit! Give us a vision for ourselves, for our families, our community and for our nation. Come Holy Spirit!

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