**From the Pulpit of**
**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SARASOTA, FL**

The Rev. Craig A. Miller

Joel 2:28a-29
Acts 2:1-12

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Pentecost

Pentecost Sunday, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. You know, Pentecost is the fourth most holy day in the church year. There is Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, then Pentecost. We in the Protestant tradition really have some issues with Pentecost, especially as we look at some people in the Pentecostal tradition who sure don't act like typical, somewhat reserved Presbyterians. There's a story told about a young woman from the country who traveled to the city one weekend, and she decided she wanted to attend the biggest church she could find. She found the most imposing building, and entered. It wasn't like her church at home. The people didn't really sing out on the hymns. They didn't clap during the hymns. The service felt rather lifeless and formal, rather stiff. But then the preacher started preaching. And he was a good preacher. She got into the sermon. On a couple of occasions, she shouted out an amen. And at one point the preacher really got to preaching, and she felt herself filled by the Spirit and she stood up on the pew and shouted out "Hallelujah! I got religion!" At that point the head usher walked down the aisle to where she was and said, "Ma'am, this church is no place to get religion."

I don't know if it was a Presbyterian church, but you know what I mean.

Pentecost. The birthday of the church – a fairly limited understanding of the day. Speaking in tongues, which is another thing most Presbyterians don't understand, and so maybe we dismiss that part of it. But understand that what was being proclaimed to all those people was the great and mighty deeds of God. But we don't really get that speaking in tongues thing, so Pentecost is still hard to understand. Then there are some preachers who think that speaking in tongues was something limited to that time a couple of thousand years ago but has no importance for us today. Interesting how we can so easily dismiss what we don't understand, isn't it?

Birthdays. Speaking in tongues.

Pentecost is about power. The Spirit came upon the disciples – and perhaps also on those who were gathered there that day – and gave them power to speak of God's deeds of power. Power. The Greek word for power is dunamis – from which we get dynamite, dynamic. Power to preach. Power to proclaim God's power. Power to stand up for God's truth in a world that lives for things that are not God's truth. And Pentecost is about the power, as we saw from the prophet Joel, and as Peter says in his sermon on that day of Pentecost, to dream dreams and see visions.

In my ministry I have been accused of being a dreamer, and I agree with that. Around 35 years ago someone in a church said to me, "I think you're a dreamer, and that concerns me, because sometimes dreamers get hurt. I don't want to see you get hurt." Joel and Peter talk about dreaming dreams. Do we in the church sometimes say, "don't dream those dreams"? "Aim lower?" The dreams I'm talking about are not such things as many people dream about, like winning the lottery, Powerball or MegaMillions. I have, on occasion, dreamt of what I might be able to do if I were to win the lottery. There are so many ministries that could be supported. A summer house in the mountains, or the beach, would be nice. But

the biggest part of that dream is thinking I could win the lottery without ever buying a ticket. I'm not talking about that kind of dream.

I'm talking more about dreams like world peace, or an end to hunger, or that no children will ever again die from shootings in schools. I mean, I'm talking big dreams. I will always believe those things are possible, because I believe in what Mary was told by the angel, that nothing is impossible with God. But I also know I have to be realistic, and think that world peace will probably not come about before Jesus comes again; that world hunger will not be ended as long as there are some around the world who overconsume while many others – billions - try to live on one or two dollars a day. I don't see the partisan differences in government easing, and violence ending. But I can hope. And I can dream.

But the dreams I am really talking about, thinking about, and dreaming, are that we in the larger church, and in the community and all our communities, can move away from an individualistic, it's-all-about-me kind of thinking that is so prevalent, and grow to a deeper understanding of the community that God desires for God's people. The dreams I am talking about deal with the kingdom of God being a present reality and not just a future hope. The dreams I am talking about can be done. The dreams I am talking about are stated so well by Elias Chacour, a Palestinian-Israeli priest, in his book Blood Brothers: "One of the first things Jesus did when he reconciled people to God was to restore human dignity. Suddenly, I knew that the first step toward reconciling Jew and Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity. Only by regaining their shattered human dignity could they begin to be reconciled to the Israeli people, whom they saw as their enemies."[i]

The restoration of human dignity. That's not attaining world peace. That's not ending hunger. That has nothing to do with gun safety or gun reform or gun violence, those terms causing walls to be built and blood pressures to spike. The restoration of human dignity. If we can recognize ourselves as children of God, loved by God, forgiven by God, made new by God in Jesus Christ, can we not also see other people - including those who are different, who are "other," who hold different political views or cultural views, as being children of God, loved by God, even if they don't know themselves that way, because we see them as God sees them, and love them as God loves them? And that in itself is a pretty big dream.

But it is doable.

I can't do that in my own power. I have too many biases, too many ways I label people, and sometimes it is hard to get past those labels. I think you know what I mean by that. But with the power of the Holy Spirit filling me and leading me, I can be an instrument of God's peace, an instrument of Christ's peace. You see, Jesus didn't see people as labels – tax collector, Samaritan, Syro-Phoenician, centurion, unclean, sinner – but he saw people as sheep without a shepherd and had compassion on them. Jesus didn't turn away from anyone, but loved them because he knew them as children of God. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do that too.

It is not easy. But then Jesus never said following him would be easy. And it is not about results, taking some time every night to go over a checklist and seeing how much progress we made, or how many people we were nice to during the day. It is about being filled with the power of the Spirit to follow Jesus, to be a servant, to go out into the mission field, which is not just some far-off place, but is also across the street or in the neighborhood or in the city of Sarasota.

Look at Peter. You have to love the guy, because he was so spontaneous, so dedicated and committed to Jesus, and so unable to do what he thought he should be able to do. "Bid me come on the water with you, Jesus. Hey, I'm walking on the water. Save me, Lord, I'm going down." "You will never wash my feet. Oh, then wash all of me." "I will never deny you. Uh, I don't know the man." And after Jesus' resurrection, when the disciples were uncertain about what might come next, he and some of the disciples

went fishing – perhaps thinking they would go back to the old life, with that wonderful three-year time with Jesus being just a great memory.

And then came the day of Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached. Boldly. Powerfully. Without fear. He proclaimed that Jesus was Lord. This same Peter, the one who a couple of months ago because of fear said three times that he did not know Jesus, now proclaimed Jesus as Lord, and said that the Spirit would come upon people so they could dream dreams and see visions. Peter was being led into a future he could not control, and he went willingly, even to the point where a little bit later he would say to the religious and political leaders who were seeking to silence him, "we must obey God rather than human authority."[ii] He went boldly into the future, dreaming dreams and living those dreams of the love of God in Christ restoring human dignity and making all things new.

Pentecost. Dreaming dreams. Power. Restoration of dignity. New life. New hope.

Be filled with the Spirit, so you can dream dreams, so you can more faithfully serve the living, risen Christ.

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[i] Elias Chacour, Blood Brothers, p. 153-4
[ii] Acts 5:29