

## **“Prophecy, Visions, and Dreams”**

**Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, June 8, 2014**

**New Testament Lesson: Acts 2:1-21**

**Old Testament lesson: Psalm 97:10-12**

During the Summer Forum last Sunday, we talked about whether all people who believe in God and are faithful go to heaven, or is it only those who identify themselves as Christian. Well, actually, the question was, “Do only Christians go to heaven;” I qualified it a bit just now by saying “... those who identify themselves as Christian.”

But that really is the question, isn't it? What does it mean to be Christian? Is it enough to say that you are a Christian – that you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? And what does it mean to “profess” something? Does that mean we have to say the words, “Jesus is my Lord and Savior,” or are there other ways to profess knowledge and love of God, even if someone has never heard the name Jesus Christ? Would that count – just believing in God and living a faithful and righteous life?

In Our New Testament lesson today, God says through the prophet Joel, “... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” Well if the Spirit of God has been poured out on all flesh, what difference does it make, one says one believes or how he/she says it? Wouldn't having the Holy Spirit poured out upon you be enough to get you into Heaven? Maybe, maybe not. Let's look at the coming of the Holy Spirit and see what difference it makes.

The Holy Spirit was poured out upon all people way back then, when Peter and the apostles walked the earth. And ever since, we as God's people, as the church, have spent the past 2,000 years growing and maturing in the Spirit. The problem is, the church won't be fully formed and perfected until the coming of the Lord.

At the coming of the Lord, says the prophet Joel, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Between now and then, our job is to grow and mature as the church, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ so that everyone has the opportunity to call on the Lord. And the only way we can do that is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nobody can talk their way into Heaven. We can't buy our way into Heaven, through good deeds or whatever.

The only way to get into Heaven is to follow the Spirit of the Lord. Can you imagine a world without the Holy Spirit?

Look at what the Spirit brought on the Day of Pentecost. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit,” says Acts, “and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” Without the Holy Spirit, we wouldn’t have the ability to truly communicate with each other; to touch each other’s lives for the better.

Acts tell us “there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at (the sound of the Holy Spirit), the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard (the apostles) speaking in the native language of each.” It didn’t matter if the words “Jesus Christ” sounded like Hey-sue Crīstō (Spanish-*phonetic spelling*), that’s the easy one; or Zez-you Krīst (French-*phonetic spelling*), or Yesus Chrīstūs (German-*phonetic spelling*). Anyone want to help with my pronunciation of “Jesus Christ,” or add to it in another language?

So, it doesn’t matter how we hear or say the words Jesus Christ, or even if someone is deaf and can never hear them, or mute and can never say them. What matters is not how the Holy Spirit works in someone’s life, but only that it is does. What matters is that we *accept the Holy Spirit and respond to its leading*.

When the world first heard the Holy Spirit speaking through the apostles in the native language of each person, everyone was amazed and astonished. “Are not these who are speaking Galileans,” they said. “And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” They were amazed and astonished to have God accommodate himself to them; speak directly to them, regardless of where they came from; regardless of the condition of their faith life.

When we serve Home Communion, which we did last week, those who receive are told that “even one who doubts or whose trust is wavering may come to the Table in order to be assured of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ.”

Even though we may be amazed, astonished and bewildered, God has made it so that everyone may come to the Lord; and having come, may receive; and receiving, may partake; and partaking, may communion; and communioning, may ascend. Everyone who comes before the Lord can be saved, no matter how they come, whether we understand the language they speak or not. ***Everyone can be saved.***

And yet, the Book of Acts records two different responses to the coming of the Holy Spirit. It says “all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” That’s OK, it’s OK to have questions.

In fact, when it comes to certainty about God, questions are often better than answers, because when we think we have all the answers, that's when we run the risk of the other type of response recorded in Acts, where it says, "... Others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'" They were accusing the Apostles of being drunk and talking gibberish.

It was the same Holy Spirit that came upon each person that day – upon "all flesh," as the prophet Joel said – and yet some accepted it and followed the spirit, and others *rejected it* and saw it as nonsense.

For those who rejected the Spirit of the Lord that day, there was nothing new or exciting; only criticism. And criticism, well that's nothing new.

Two centuries ago, a man watched as Robert Fulton tested his steamboat. The man stood on the shore yelling, "It'll never start! It'll never start." Just then the steamboat pulled away from the dock and moved majestically up the Hudson River. And there stood that skeptic, but this time he was yelling, "It'll never stop! It'll never stop!"

We are each standing on the shore of our faith journey, watching the Holy Spirit move through our lives and through the world. And some people accept it and move out with the Holy Spirit. And others stand their ground; they reject it, they see God's living word as nothing but gibberish. Now, which one of those do you think gets to Heaven?

Life without the Holy Spirit is no life at all, whether we are talking about the "here and now" or life eternal with God in Heaven. It's only those who embrace the Spirit of God who have the hope and promise of Heaven. When God pours out the Holy Spirit upon us, says Acts, "your sons and your daughters ... prophesy, and your young men ... see visions, and your old men ... dream dreams. On "both men and women, in those days says God, I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

Prophecy, visions, and dreams. That's what comes with the Holy Spirit – prophecy, or the ability to see and proclaim the truth; visions, an image of what is clearly possible tomorrow, regardless of what's going on today; and dreams, those personal thoughts and intentions that no one can take from us.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God gives to each one of us prophetic, divine truth, whether we like it or not; visions, either hopeful with God or dismal for those who reject God; and dreams, both great and small.

Those who know and follow the truth of God's living word, those who envision a future of possibility and hope, who hold onto their dreams at all cost – these are the ones set to attain *the very heights of Heaven*.

Does that describe who you are in life – someone full of the Holy Spirit, someone full of divine, prophetic truth, a hopeful vision of the future, and inspiring dreams for yourself and for our world? And if not – if we find ourselves lacking in the Holy Spirit – pray.

Pray for God's spirit of truth, hope and inspiration to come upon you – upon us – and upon everyone the world over. Amen.

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

God of creation, you formed us out of your incredible love and breathed life into us. By your Spirit, breathe new life and faith into our daily living.

Lead us to life eternal, by the mighty love of Jesus Christ.

O God, show us the power of reconciling love. On Pentecost, you filled your disciples with strength, vision and confidence. Do so again, here and now.

Bring upon us in this time of celebration, a new sense of your life-giving Spirit.

We pray your Spirit of comfort on all those who grieve, your Spirit of generosity upon us when faced by any in need, and your Spirit of healing for all who are sick or recovering from disease or other medical problems.

In the name of the Holy One we pray, as you taught us, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive  
our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**