

June 8, 2014 Acts 2: 1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

A Time to Dream

As you go through our city right now we seem to be living in a rainbow city. There are signs everywhere – green, orange, red and blue and some are making a statement in black and white. Normally the colours of the rainbow signify harmony, the possibility of full acceptance and welcome for everyone no matter what their colour, creed, sexual orientation or class. When our governments are elected we hope that they remember that being in a democracy means that everyone is trying to work together so that everyone in our society is respected and included in a sharing of our wealth and human rights.

Of course you know that I am referring to signs placed on lawns, along pathways and roadways identifying the various political parties running in the upcoming provincial election. Each party has a dream, a vision of how our lives can be strengthened, our sharing be more just, our environment be renewed. I am not even going to try to articulate the vision that each political party has, because midst all the accusations, hurling of insults back and forth, my own interpretation will only add to the confusion.

As a Christian, when I vote, I try to discern which parties vision most articulates elements of the vision of the Kingdom of God which runs as a theme throughout the Old and New Testaments – Micah 6:” What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”. Mt 25: I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.” No doubt each of you has some texts or writings that inspire you and help you to dream God’s dream. We all need a dream to know how to take the next step forward.

When I was at Minneapolis over a week ago at the Festival of Homiletics, which was a rich week of listening to sermons and music from Protestant churches and theological colleges across the US. Our own Rev Anthony Bailey was one of planners and facilitators of the event. But the dream which kept coming up in more than one sermon, was that of the iconic speech by Dr Martin Luther King, the “I have a Dream Speech” which was given almost 5 decades ago and inspired the civil rights movement.

However, according to King’s right hand man, his lawyer, speech writer and confidante Clarence Jones, those words almost did not happen, in that they were not in the script he had written for King. Evidently King improvised on the spot, reviving a phrase he has used previously with little impact, according to Jones. Somehow the Spirit seemed to

move despite all efforts to choreograph what was said and done that fateful day in 1963. And of course the Spirit was encouraged by a singer, and a woman – Mahalia Jackson...she shouted to him ‘tell them about the dream, Martin, tell them about the dream.’”

"His reaction to it was to look in the direction of Mahalia, but then to take the prepared text that he was reading, and slide it to the left side of the lectern," Jones says.

King had gone from lecturer, to preacher. Says Clarence Jones, "I turned to somebody standing next to me and I said 'these people don't know it, but they're about to go to church'."

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

...And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream..

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

Over 89 years ago our forbearers who formed the United Church of Canada, creating a strong Protestant Church that would draw many smaller struggling churches together as the nation of Canada was being strengthened and built. Formed by an act of Parliament, our church was determined to help build a strong sense of justice and citizenship in her people, giving people the capacity to care for each other. The people of that generation, people like our mothers and fathers, our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, people in the congregations of our aboriginal brothers and sisters - they had a dream of making the values and dreams of God’s Kingdom a reality as our nation changed and grew. They were the builder generation, who have given us the legacy of our institutions, religious, civic, political, educational, giving us structures and rules to live by. Hierarchical structures seemed to be the model which fulfilled the dream.

However, things have changed as the world has become a global village, a dream which they helped to birth. The internet and social media have broken down barriers and opened up the world for us. The institutions have sometimes taken on a life of their own instead of being a useful tool or guideline to help us get our work done, to enable us plan how to fulfill our dreams. And so, in this post-modern world, we are faced with changing, evaluating what we have been given. We are invited to dream again, to discern what structures, what courts of the church, what ways of interacting with each other are still meaningful and life-giving.

Within our denomination we have been going through the important process called “the comprehensive review” which moves us from a hierarchy to notions of concentric circles built not so much on roles but on relationships –circles of engagement. The initial responses have been extremely mixed and leave many of us feeling worried and wondering what will emerge if we are plunged into a time of chaos if all the structures we

have known disappear?. The invitation is there for all of us to study, reflect and offer your own opinions.

We are in a time of dreaming, ushered in by our celebration of Pentecost as we look forward to celebrating the 89th birthday of the United Church. But we know the birth of the church goes a long way further back than that, to time of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit was released upon the Jews who were gathered to celebrate the Harvest Festival. It was a global kind of experience for them as people from all their known nations were gathered: they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability...some thought they were drunk –filled with new wine.

The celebration of Pentecost told in Acts with images of leaping tongues of fire, howling wind and inspired utterances, is both chaotic and invigorating.

I like what Lillian Roberts, our Presbytery minister has to say in her blog:

“It sounds a lot like life in the church in June 2014 – chaotic but invigorating.

Somewhere along the historical road to the order of Christendom and institutional prominence, the church lost its taste for chaos and passion. So here we are, gingerly nibbling at the edges, and wondering if we might learn to like it again. Truth is, we are not sure. Well, maybe I should be more honest, truth is, I am not sure. There is much to be said for order and structure and predictability in terms of managing things. But I know that when I experience the Spirit moving in the church, it is far more often when there is unpredictable sources of energy; when images and language bounce with power to change and transform; when what we thought was unlikely becomes the possible; when a new wind of wisdom breathes into weary followers.”

Our new life begins with a dream, and this is the season of dreaming –spring and summer as the season of nature bears fruit. Today we have welcomed a beautiful little boy, Logan, into the family of the church – with a splash of baptismal water – to become part of a group of hopeful dreamers, hoping that through the church, through the love of his Mom and Dad and family, the people who take responsibility for shaping his life, that he will catch a glimpse of God’s dream for the world, that his own creativity will be lit and empowered by the Spirit to do amazing things in life.

For his life began as a dream by his parents, for a child, and before that, a dream of how their lives would come together in a partnership. We also offer Greg Bennett a blessing for his life as he has been awakened to the dream of the importance of being part of a loving church family that cares about each other throughout all the seasons of life.

We are invited to be dreamers, to not be afraid to be open to where the Spirit might lead us. So let us not be afraid to share our dreams with one another, to offer testimony, to share what we believe God is saying to us, for that is how we will determine where we

are going, how we are going to live with each other in all spheres of life. But we do not dream alone, for as Easter draws to a close on this day, we remember that Jesus Christ is risen, undefeated by the powers of sin and death, still alive to gift us with wisdom, compassion and all the spiritual gifts that we will need to keep on living with joy, courage and with hope. He is here to feed us – for even dreamers need a good meal to sustain their journey.