

Dreams

I've been thinking a lot lately about how some of the dreams of my life have come to pass. For example, twenty five years ago next month, my former husband, cat, and three children packed up all our belongings and moved from Vancouver to a new home nestled just below the Kettle Valley Rail above the village of Naramata.

It was a dream come true for me as I always wanted to live in the country.

It wasn't a dream without some struggles, however, as we all had to find new ways to fit in to the community.

The way we dressed, the way we spoke, the way we looked, the things we thought important didn't quite fit with life in a small community.

It took about 3 years for all that to come together.

All that said, putting wheels under our dream for our life as a family was one well worth staying with through thick and thin!

One of the gifts of that time for me was a deepening connection to folks at the Naramata Centre.

A particular gift for me was my introduction to Marion Best just as she

was about to become the 35th moderator of the United Church of Canada.

I mention this because I recently came across a video clip of Marion being interviewed during her term as moderator about that time.

It was interesting to hear Marion speak about her dreams for the church and the ensuing struggles: advocacy for same sex ordination, conflict resolution, involvement in truth and reconciliation work, and a longing for an truly intergenerational church.

Marion's prophetic leadership as moderator now 25 years came to mind again as I listened to our reading from Acts this morning.

In particular, the verses about sons and daughters, young and old, slaves, and free whose visions and dreams for the community remind me of our own ongoing struggles to be the church in this time and in this place.

These are just some of the thoughts that came to mind for me this morning as we come to the celebration of the day of Pentecost this morning.

Pentecost Sunday is one of my favourite high holy days in the church

calendar year! Its right up there with Christmas Eve, Palm Passion Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter.

Pentecost is the day in the church calendar year when we celebrate the birth of the church and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In some churches where I've served, it's been fun to experience the different ways the day is celebrated and the different traditions church families bring to this day.

Sometimes, like here this morning, people come dressed in bright colours to represent the bright energy poured out on the gathered community by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

In most cases as is also the case here today, special care is taken to decorate the space with symbolic red banners.

Also, the case here today is that extra time and thought have been put into choosing just the right hymns and prayers to evoke the Spirit's presence for the celebration.

It *is* good to have a little fun from time to time when we gather for worship, isn't it?

God knows far too often, how we as followers in the Way of Jesus, have been marginalized and stereotyped as being anything but fun.

With all of that in mind, then, let's turn again to our text from this morning taken from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Here in our reading we find ourselves in the company of 150 or so of Jesus' growing band of followers, gathered together behind locked doors in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem.

The air feels tinged with fear as they come together as instructed by Jesus who has gone to be God.

Is it any wonder that they might be filled with apprehension?

For among the 150 would also be the original ten who had accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem just 50 days earlier for the Feast of the Passover.

For those original ones, memories of their last gathering in the aftermath and trauma of their beloved Jesus' death on the cross and his appearances to them as the risen Christ would have been fresh on their minds.

Once again, these 50 days later, Jerusalem is thronging with crowds of pilgrims, gathered in the Holy City to celebrate the Festival of Weeks or 'Shavuot', the annual celebration of the first fruits of the summer harvest.

Together, the gathered body watches and waits on Jesus' promise to send them a new leader-one he describes as a special friend, an advocate, or translated from the Greek word 'paraclete', a companion who would come alongside and support them in their ongoing mission and ministries.

Given all they've experienced, it seems almost unfathomable to me what hopes

and fears, dreams and expectations they would bring to that occasion.

Maybe some came hoping to manage their very real fears of being singled out as followers in the Way of Jesus and then being badly treated by the Roman authorities.

Maybe others came wishing they had never signed on to follow in the footsteps of this radical revolutionary named Jesus.

Perhaps still others came eager for their dreams and visions for turning of the world upside down to come to pass.

Surely, what happened that day far exceeded anyone's expectations!

Some might wonder how it could possibly be that so many folk could communicate God's powerful deeds speaking together in new and diverse languages!

For others, there would need to be much time and space after the fact to try to make sense of what had happened.

For the apostle, Peter, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost seems to have galvanized him for new leadership.

Here in his first off-the-cuff sermon, Peter reminds those present that there can be no going back to the way things were.

Though some might shrink from Peter's emphasis on end times, what I

hear in his words is a lifting up of the diversity of dreams shared by young and old, men and women, slaves and free.

Further to that, Peter reminds all who have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to listen of the need to be anchored in an understanding of Jesus' saving grace.

For me, Peter's words of prophecy call to mind the words of other dreams and other dreamers, other visions and other visionaries.

All of this brings me back full circle to my memories of Marion Best in her role as moderator of the United Church of Canada from 1994-1997.

Marion's prophetic leadership then calls to mind some of the very same issues we continue to face in our church in these days.

Let us be mindful this Pentecost Day of our own inclination to want to domesticate or explain away the reality of the Holy Spirit's wild ways.

Instead, let us imagine making space for our unspoken dreams for the vitality and longevity of our church to be dreamt as they struggle to be brought to birth.

In the name of unity in diversity, my fondest prayer is that it may it be so, amen.

Rev. Elizabeth Bowyer reserves all rights © 2018. You are welcome to use, copy, edit or reproduce this sermon with copyright attached. Publication is prohibited.