

Our Happy Place (4) - Openess Yesterday's Sermon Summary

We covered KirkWood's 4th core value yesterday, which reads:

"4) Openness: 'Reformed and Always Reforming'

- As a PCUSA church, we seek to be open to God's continuing work of reformation within our church so that we will be more effective in our God-given mission. We recognize that we are in a rapidly changing world in which new challenges, needs, opportunities, and questions arise constantly, so we must be open to responding with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love while being guided by our Christ-centered values."



We took a deep dive into Joel 2.28-32 yesterday, the single Old Testament passage Peter the disciple uses to explain the events of Pentecost, namely the outpouring of God's Spirit onto those first Christians gathered in Jerusalem (as recorded in The Acts of the Apostles chp. 2).

We noticed a number of things:

- God's Spirit would be poured out equally upon all flesh/people, not merely on a chosen few, like kings or prophets.
- The young would "prophesy," which means to challenge, provoke, speak up, and speak out against. Or, as The Society of Biblical Literature puts it, "to be an inspired spokesperson for God."
- Young and old alike will dream and envision. These are disclosures from God, not of our own making.
- Even the lowest of the low in the ancient world, slaves, would be endowed with God's Spirit and inspiration in the very same way as everyone else.
- When this takes place, it will be earth-shaking and world-changing (see Joel 2.31-32, part of Peter's citation in Acts 2).

So, what does this tell us about openness? Two things, at the least:

1) Each one of us needs to be open to God inspiring us to prophesy (to provoke or speak out), to dream, and to catch a vision of God's preferred present and future.

Dallas Willard in his classic work, "Hearing God," notes several ways that we can close ourselves off from being inspired by God in this way:

- God's communication comes to us in many forms, not merely the ones we expect or want, so our ears and hearts need to be open as wide as the many ways God might inspire us.

- Are we open to hearing whatever it is that God might want to say to us, even if it goes against one of our present assumptions or cherished values? When God comes to inspire you to challenge or envision, it will be with His message, provocation, or dream, not your own. To be inspired by God is bigger than what we currently believe or think is possible.
- Are we willing to speak or act when the message comes, because more often than not, when God inspires a prophetic message or dream, it is to be shared with others, not kept to ourselves?

2) But, equally, Joel 2 says that we need to be open to how God inspires others, because they have been given God's Spirit to the very same degree that we have been. We cannot really say that we are heeding God's Spirit in our own lives if we aren't hearing what God's Spirit is saying through the lives of others.

Joel 2.28-32 says that we need to listen deeply to challenges and dreams of generations that are not our own. To value only the perspective of your own generation is to miss out on so much of what God is saying in and to the world.

Also, Joel 2 counsels us to pay close attention to the provocations and visions for God's better future that come to us from the marginalized and overlooked.

3) It is this openness to God's inspiration in ourselves and all others that will be no less than, as Dr. Willie James Jennings of Yale Divinity School puts it, "a new world order, the beginning of God's good end."

The late Henri Nouwen wrote that, "Without Pentecost the Christ-event – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – remains imprisoned in history as something to remember, think about and reflect on. The Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell within us, so that we can become living Christs here and now." To put that in the words of Joel 2, Jesus was a prophet, dreamer, and visionary, and God has given us His Spirit so that we might be God's prophets, dreamers, and visionaries too.

Celebrate Pentecost this Week

1. Maybe most of all, pay attention this week to how God may be inspiring you to speak up, provoke, dream, or envision, and, equally, lean in to how God is inspiring others in the very same ways, especially those who aren't of your particular age group, or who are too easily overlooked and marginalized.

2. Scripture reading this week:

- Read all of Joel 2, which begins with God's people being invaded and suffering under a locust plague, followed predictably by the promise of rescue by God, the climax of which are the verses we explored yesterday (2.28-32): [Joel 2 NRSVUE](#)
- Read the story of the first Pentecost, which will include Peter's use of Joel 2.28-32 to explain the outpouring of God's Spirit: [Acts 2 NRSVUE](#)
- Check out what it's like to experience dreaming God's dreams, as described in the opening verses of Psalm 126: [Psalm 126 NRSVUE](#)

3. Some daily devotionals about Pentecost to sprinkle throughout your week: [Daily Devotional for Small Group Discussion: The Wonder of It All](#) and [Babble](#) and [The Giver of Life](#) and [All Together](#)

4. Some Pentecost prayers and liturgy to use throughout the week (you can change the plural pronouns to singular): [A Prayer to God, the Spirit](#) and [Centering Prayer: Romans 8: 22-27](#) and [My Prayer for Pentecost](#) and [Pentecost Prayer: Breath of God](#)

5. If you want to check out the section of the PCUSA Book of Order that inspired this 4th KW core value, you'll find it on pages 38-39 of the PDF online Book of Order: [boo_2023-2023_publishedversion_cover_and_boo_complete.pdf](#)