

Wesley United Methodist Church

May 20, 2018

“The Church of Your Dreams.”

Acts 2:1-21

The new St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Beulah, Michigan is built on a site of which dreams are made. It sits perched high on a ridge, overlooking rolling hills and orchards and Platte Lake. You can see Lake Michigan and Empire Dunes in the distance. On a clear day you can see all the way to the Manitou Islands. The new church has beautiful open beams arching overhead, and on three sides it's solid glass, floor to ceiling, so that no matter where you sit in the sanctuary you can take in that incredible view. It's worth going to church, regardless of the quality of the sermon.

Ned Edwards was the pastor when the church was built. During the summer the church opened. Ned said, “This summer I have spent at least one or two hours every day guiding people who stop to see this wonderful church building. One man said to me, ‘With all this glass, the high ceiling and beautiful views, is this the church you always dreamed of?’ I almost said “yes,” but I knew it wasn't true.”

I said, ‘This is the church I dreamed of, but not because of the windows, the view, or the architecture. It is the church of my dreams because it is an amazing group of people who become alive together in Christ, who found a spirit to join in the community of faith, and who have expressed it in a building.’”

He is right, of course. The church of our dreams is not just about a renovated building, bricks and mortar, organ and chancel, pews and parlors. It's about people becoming alive together in Christ, finding a spirit of joy in the community of faith, and expressing it in real.

The Book of Acts takes us back to the beginning—back to the church in it's early days, back before buildings when all they had was each other—and perhaps there we can catch a glimpse of God's early dream to inspire our dreams of what God would do through us.

If you continued reading ahead in the Book of Acts, you find that after the day of Pentecost, Peter and John get dragged into court for healing a lame man. Luke says: “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they knew they had been with Jesus.”

There was something about their demeanor, something about their spirit and vitality. There was something about their boldness that told the world they had been with Jesus.

The church of our dreams is a church where we dare to dream, to risk, to speak, to act, to serve, to love...with boldness.

Lloyd Ogilvie, retired chaplain of the U.S. Senate, in his book, *From Boredom and Blandness to Boldness*, says that's what is needed in the church at large today, is to move from boredom and blandness to boldness. In a day of uncertainty and economic upheaval, it's easy to justify retrenching, hunkering down, holding back. And clearly these are days which call for careful attention to the changes going on around us. But it is also a day which calls for the church to live in courage, as a sign of hope in a world of fear and anxiety. And the prayer of the church today? To live in the boldness of the faith, willing to risk, to dream, to dare for the sake of Christ.

As Ned says, the church of our dreams is a church where people “come alive together” in faith and witness. When you read Peter's sermon, the inaugural sermon of the Christian era, you discover a profound statement of the faith. No dumbing down of the message, no soft-pedaling the witness of Jesus Christ. It is a call to grow deeply in the faith. Luke says the disciples committed themselves to the apostles teaching, breaking of bread and prayer. And that is still the source of the church's strength today.

One of the great challenges of a multi-cultural and multi-religious day is the ability to proclaim our faith in clarity, yet with grace and openness to others. This day calls for a deep understanding of the faith we have to share with the world.

A study of mega-churches today reports that in eighty-eight percent of the rapidly growing mega-churches, have Bible study, exploration of the faith, and small groups that are central to their life. You know what? They are taking a page right out of the Wesleyan Methodist playbook. Methodism grew up in England and on the American frontier with the spread of class meetings and bands and societies, small groups for growing together in the faith. Here is a call to grow deeply in our knowledge and understanding, to grow deeply in our fellowship and prayer life, to grow deeply in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Running through the life of the church should be a stream of passionate love, energizing our witness and empowering our ministry, moving us to action to care for the whole person, to care for the whole world, to care for the whole of creation, to caring passionately.

One of the things I am most proud of in this church, which is lived out in so many ways is the way we care for one another and our compassion for the world. Through it all is a passion for ministry.

Unfortunately, that is what's missing in much of our church life today. There are too many folks who are satisfied to come to church to be "fed," and if they don't get fed, they patter off to someplace else where the feeding is better. But tame, tepid, lukewarm faith simply will not do in this day. It calls for us to "grow deeply."

I mean, how else can you explain what happens in the book of Acts? It begins with a feeble group of 120 gathered in an upper room with nothing but a promise, and suddenly grows to three thousand with new persons being added everyday, ultimately turning the world upside down. How else do you explain it...except by the power of God? When was the last time God worked through you in such a way that you knew beyond doubt that God had done it?

What is happening in our life together which cannot be explained by our own energy, our own strength, our own intelligence, but can only be explained by the power of God? What small act which you offered to someone else, almost unconsciously, made all the difference for the other person? Do we really believe God can do more through us than we have yet imagined? In the words of Jabez, do we believe God can expand our territory, broaden our reach, enliven our ministry with a vision which can only be fulfilled by God's power at work in us?

I think Ned Edwards was right—not just about the Beulah church, but any church, our church. It is the church of our dreams, not because of higher ceilings or windows or the view. It is the church of our dreams because of people who come alive together in Christ, who find a joy in the community of faith, and who express it in tangible ways. The church of our dreams is a church where people live boldly, grow deeply and care passionately, a church that can only be explained by the power of God at work in us.

Well, the Holy Spirit came, Peter preached, and three thousand persons were added to the church that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer, "and awe came upon everyone because of the signs and wonders." It happened for the disciples. May it happen for us, even today. Amen.