

DREAMS AND VISIONS
Joel 2:23-32
Sunrise Presbyterian Church
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"I've got dreams to remember," Otis Redding croons - remembering a lost love - dreams to remember - recalling happier days. How often do we think back and remember - the years when the kids were little - our younger selves - beloved family members who have died -- the way it used to be? We remember and we remember . . . and if we are not careful we will color our past with brighter hues than it perhaps deserves --- we'll remember the good times - we might forget the bad - we can easily put our focus on what happened to us yesterday rather than what might happen today. It's very easy to live in the past - especially when our lives today present us difficulties.

We are not unlike the people the prophet speaks to in our morning reading from Joel. They do not want to think about the future - they have lived through an ecological disaster caused by several years of agricultural devastation due to locusts. The cutter, the hopper, the destroyer, a great army of swarming bugs - has eaten every last piece of green crop for the past several years - and now they don't even have seed to plant to try to make another crop. They don't want to think about today and tomorrow -- they'd like to just dream about the years before those bugs arrived.

And we know stories about locusts. We've had damage done to crops by them - we know people who lost their crop to locusts and other blights. Many here lived through the dirty thirties and tell the stories of crop after crop drying up in the field - the earth barren and dry - the people empty and devoid of dreams and visions.

So let's imagine hearing Joel's words as if they were directed to Kansans in the 30s at the height of the Dust Bowl -- or imagine Joel's words to those of us who have lost beloved loved ones and have no idea how to go on - imagine Joel's words to those of us who have so much to do between work and family that it seems never-ending - imagine Joel's words to those of us who'd far rather live in the past - imagine Joel's words to Sunrise as we live in days of changing beliefs and culture -

Because Joel says to all of us that we should get up and sing and dance for the Lord will restore the earth - rain will come and crops will grow. Harvest will

overflow and people will eat. The good things of the earth will come again. The earth will be restored.

And we - will be restored. Restoration means an amazing thing: God's Spirit will pour out on everybody - our children will tell us how our actions lead us away from God - our old men will talk and dream about the future rather than reminiscing about the past - our young people will overflow with visions of God's kingdom being realized right here in Salina. Rich - poor - young - old - God's Spirit will pour out on everybody and help us to see how we can start working on those dreams - and how we can begin to put those visions into action.

For Joel's people the outpouring of God's Spirit helped them plow and plant - tend and nurture a new crop for a new day. Sometimes we imagine God's Spirit as so holy and other that it would never help us in our daily lives. For us here at Sunrise, God's Spirit poured out helps us be part of a congregation listening and working to find where God's Spirit is leading us. What it is God is calling us to do? - we've been asking that question this year at Sunrise - and I've experienced some eye rubbing and head scratching as dream after dream have been expressed at committee meetings and session - Why not cook hot dogs in our wonderful park and invite the neighbors? Why wouldn't we plan a coat drive with someone we just met? Why not plan a mission trip to Honduras? We've dreamed and that dreaming has helped us to open ourselves to new ways we might help. We discovered that our actions can help God's Spirit touch other people.

I've seen God's Spirit working with our kids - as they begin to put into words and actions to describe what it means to be kind and good in our world. I've seen that Spirit with our youth as they've developed deeper relationships with adults at Sunrise - I've seen dreams and visions start to take hold in new and different places at Sunrise this year.

One of those places I did not expect to find an outpouring of Spirit was the 2017 budget. Money is usually tight at Sunrise - and we are really thrifty. But this year, we asked our committees to dream as they submitted their budget proposals. We asked them what would better help them make dreams and visions realities. They sent proposals. I know of changes to the Christian Education budget that will help us fund Heartland Day Camp next summer and afford the really neat art supplies we use at God's Kids. I know of changes that will improve our music - our mission - our work - our dreams. All these dreams are translated into numbers.

And somehow, when the dreams came together in the budget - they only increased our current budget by 1%! I rubbed my eyes when I saw that bottom line - the old men on the Finance Committee shook their heads in disbelief -

because we realized that it is within the reach of what this congregation can give to fully fund our 2017 dream budget! It's not some pie in sky vision we'll never see - it's very doable that Sunrise can fully fund this budget! It's amazing that all of us together can keep working and listening and giving to help others around us experience the outpouring of God's Spirit.

As you leave the sanctuary today, you'll find your 2017 pledge card in your box. We are going to take a month to pray and think and listen to God as we each ponder what we can give. On November 20, we'll dedicate our pledges during our annual Thanksgiving worship, and we'll celebrate together with our Sunrise Thanksgiving dinner. We know that God has indeed blessed us this year at Sunrise.

And so if we imagine ourselves among that great crowd Joel speaks of - young - old - rich - poor - men - women - let's do some eye rubbing this month - let's clear our heads and look to the future - could we each increase our pledge by 1%? Could we do that? Could we do more than that? It doesn't seem much - but it would make a tremendous difference in how Sunrise can help offer kindness and love to everyone we encounter. It would matter so much.

Often in our complex world, we imagine that we can't change things - we can't change politics or global warming - or end war - we often feel powerless. And yet, here's the prophet calling us to get up and dance - to celebrate - to help bring in the harvest - because there is work to do. "Here I Am, Lord" we love to sing - "I have heard you calling in the night." Might we reply, "I will go Lord - I will work, Lord, I will give, Lord - I will hold your people in my hand." Alleluia! Amen.