

Part II

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Preached at the Lower Merion Baptist Church
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Acts 2:1-21

"...I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..."

Pentecost

Movement I – Vision

We have made it this far. It has been quite a journey, we have traveled quite a distance, we have made it this far, and now we find ourselves standing, wondering, staring and asking ourselves, what is next? We have journeyed to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Christ. We saw the Magi, the shepherds and we saw the angles in the sky at that humble and lowly stable. We watched and waited for Jesus to grow so that we could walk with him and experience his ministry at his side. We were there when he was baptized by John; we were there when he changed water into wine, when he called the other disciples and when he began to heal all those around him. We remember hearing him teach in Jerusalem, criticizing the Pharisees and the temple leaders. We remember watching the crowd in their fickle way turn from positive to negative. We remember the trail, the wounds he endured, and the suffering of his life on the day he was crucified. We were there with the other disciples when the women came to us full of energy, full of anxiety and disbelief that the tomb was empty! Then there was that day when we were all on the boat fishing, and we saw on the shore Jesus there, waiting for us, preparing breakfast for us. It was a glorious time to be walking with Jesus again, to hear his voice again and to witness his miracles again. Finally, we remember the day when Jesus left us, the day when Jesus was lifted up into heaven while he was blessing us. It was quite a journey; it was quiet an adventure that we have endured as we have walked with Christ. Now what? No what do we do as we wait around, as we wonder and consider what our options might be. Do we disband; do we find someone else to follow? What should the next chapter of our journey look like? How should the second part of Christianity be experienced and lived out?

Maybe if we had a vision of what to do next. Maybe if we could see the potential in others or in yourself as a community? Do you have dreams for your future? Do you have any vision? It is something that seems to be vital for a community to continue in any kind of forward motion. When a business hires an executive often the interviewing team asks, "What is your vision?" The former C.E.O. of General Motors, Jack Welch said, "Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion."

When a politician speaks he or she often speaks of a vision. They try to wax eloquently about where they may see the country headed, about the potential for the country. You may remember Regan's invocation of the "City on a Hill," harkening back to Winthrop's writings and speeches with the early pilgrims. Regan was evoking a vision that gave a sense of direction for the country. An artist can look at a block of stone and see beauty, see form and see possibility – it is his vision that he works to bring to reality with a chisel and hammer. Do you have any vision for the church? Can you see the potential, the possibility, and the probability in people, places or situations? We have traveled quite a ways, we have experienced a lot and now we may be wondering what to do. Do you have any ideas, any dreams? Do you have any vision?

Before Easter our vision was grand and lofty. Maybe some of us resonated with the some of the disciples who saw a new world order with Christ. Some of the disciples saw a potential to overthrow Rome, to bring Israel back to glory, to bring relief and rest to the suffering, comfort to

the afflicted and good news to the poor. That may have been their vision as they walked with Jesus. Some of us may have resonated with other disciples who had a vision of power and fame. James and John asked to sit at the right and left of Christ at the banquet table. They expected that because of their association with Christ they would receive special status in this world and the next. Were we looking for fame through our association with Jesus?

Some just had a vision of a new, different and changed life. Maybe we had those visions as well early in the ministry of Jesus. Maybe we had visions of healing, visions of transformation and redemption and of a new order in the world. Before Easter we had a vision of what life would be like, of how life could change as we walked with Jesus.

Yet after Easter, visions may have changed. After Easter, the impossible had occurred breaking the standards and the boundaries of the world. After Easter we are all living in the reality that death is not the end, that Christ has transcended death, and that life reigns through Christ. How does one live with such a revelation? Maybe our minds have been scrambled with the recent events of Easter, and maybe we have to let go of any previous conception of what Christ was supposed to be about, because we do not know what to expect any more. Maybe now as we walk with Jesus, and soak in his every word, we can only point to Jesus and say, “he has our vision, and he knows where we are going.” After the resurrection we can no longer predict who or what or when, but could only look to Jesus and trust in him.

And then Christ left us. Christ gave us a new and a profound hope and then left. Christ has left and here we are standing and wondering what to do next. Here we are wondering what the second part of our journey with Christ may look like. Here we are without much direction leading us in how to be a follower of Jesus.

Do you have any vision? Do you have an idea where you are going, what you might be doing? Do you have any foresight; can you see into your hopeful future? Are you like Butch Cassidy who has vision while the rest of the world wears bifocals, or are you like the Sundance Kid who tags along with Cassidy for the adventure? We want to be like Cassidy, someone who has an idea, who has a plan and who has a vision but what might that vision be for the church? Helen Keller once said, “The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but no vision.” Do you have any vision for the church?

One of the lessons that I have heard again and again from other pastors is that to serve a church the pastor should have a vision. The pastor should know where he or she wants the church to go. The pastor should have a clear idea about the future of the church and what the church should look like in the next three to five years. So you probably want to ask your pastor, you probably want to ask me if I have a vision for this church. You probably want to know if I have any vision. Maybe you would like for me to give you flow charts, pie and bar graphs, and a strict timeline of goals and objectives for the next five years. Maybe you are hoping that I can offer a vision of where we are to go next. But instead I am going to ask you if you have a vision for this church? Do you have a vision for your family, for your friends, and for yourself? We’ve come a long way, so what is next, what is the second part of this journey.

Movement 2 – A Floundering People/A Controlling People

We need something to give us focus. We need something to keep us grounded, to keep us moving in a productive direction. We need something to give us focus.

It may make us uncomfortable to be floundering around without any sense of direction. It may make us nervous to not have any sense of focus, or of where we are going. Our world is focused on having and living with a plan, on being focused or having a sense of direction. We

need to know that we are headed somewhere, that we are going in a specific direction. We make sure our children have a plan from the day they are born so they will achieve happiness. Our children are supposed to enroll into a college-pre nursery school, go to a private and elite elementary, middle and high school, know at least one other language, play an instrument, participate on a sports team, and then go to a good private or ivy league school. We need a plan. In high school, students tend to meet with a guidance counselor to map out, to decide, and to settle on his or her plan for the next four years. We need a plan for our jobs, for our families and for ourselves. We need to know what is coming up, what we should expect and how we can prepare for the rest of our lives.

Remember the disciples from last week? Last week we left them praising God. Last week we left them singing praises, full of joy and happy, happy, happy. The scripture suggested that they stayed in this blissful state for the week, just constantly praising the Lord. If you were to walk past them in Jerusalem, you would hear them singing and shouting praise, and you would not pay much mind to the commotion. If you were to walk past them again you would hear much of the same, and maybe you would start to wonder about this group of religious folks. If you were to walk past them a third time you would hear more praising and singing and joyful noises, and maybe you would start to shake your head over this band of religious vagrants. Maybe you would start to scorn and scowl at this group of unrefined religious recreationists. How could a group continue to do the same thing day after day? How could a people continue to be stuck and stagnate without any forward motion? They must lack vision and focus to give them more to do than to just praise. You shake your head in despair as you go off to your Franklin Planner seminar, your life coach meeting, or your feel good self help group that gives you control over you life. You shake your head and repeat the mantras taught by many in the world, we need a vision, and we need something to give us focus.

Any of you who have worked with children know about this. If you put children in a room without any instruction at all, chaos will ensue. If you tell them to stack up the blocks that might work for about ten seconds, and then they will lose interest and go back to chaos. But if you tell them you are building a castle, if you give them a vision and a plan they will remain focused and some might even try to see the task through. They need vision to keep them focused.

I wonder if it becomes an issue not just of vision, but of control. I wonder if it becomes an issue of having our whole day planned out, our whole life planned out that we have control over every aspect of our lives dictating when and where things will happen. When does the vision service the purpose of controlling our lives? The philosopher, Fredric Nietzsche saw the mass population as a mess of people without control or focus. They were a mob or a herd to him that needed some focus. Nietzsche argued that the individual who was true to him or her self would control the mob, would guide the herd with his or her own individual vision. Machiavelli talked about controlling fortune in a misogynistic way, suggesting that one should not just sit and wait for something to happen, but seize the events of your life.

I know of churches that cling to a vision tightly with very little room for compromise or wiggle. These are churches that have a three-year plan with such a focus on detail and on the minutiae that there is little room for spontaneity or from any movement from God. This drive for control comes from a group of Christians who find themselves standing and wondering what to do next, and cannot rest in the unknowing. I know of pastors that enter into a church with gangbusters of a vision, seeing a very specific product in the future for the church. These are pastors who feel that there is only one particular way to be a church, to have a relationship with Christ, and feel that they must control their relationship and the movement of the church. They

see a very specific kind of church, and they push their vision regardless if it fits with the church and the community or not. The vision becomes a controlling element in their ministry.

For a while our education system was based around a specific vision of how children would learn, and there was very little room for negotiation in the classroom. Yet, now many educators claim that children have a variety of intelligences and learn in a variety of ways. The old vision would restrict the child that learns through kinesthetic or through auditory means. The vision would control the education system and restrict a lot of learning that a child could achieve.

So we can walk by the disciples and scoff because they seem to be a misguided band of miscreants without any focus of vision. We can criticize, but then we must ask ourselves, is our vision constricting and controlling us. We need something to give us focus, but do we lose focus in our vision? When we control so much in our lives, do we still trust God? When we strive to have so much planned and accounted for, are we still keeping ourselves open to the actions and the movement of the Holy Spirit?

Movement 3 – The Entrance of the Holy Spirit

The disciples may have felt the urge to organize, to decide what to do next, but they kept themselves open. Christ told them to wait, and they were waiting. They were waiting for something to happen, something that would change them and give them direction in their ministry. Gathered together they waited and waited until finally, on that blessed day, something happened. The Holy Spirit happened.

Something happens to us as well, the Holy Spirit happens to us. The Holy Spirit enters our lives and takes the focus of what we are going to do, and the need to control the future from us. The Holy Spirit enters into our lives, grabs us and takes the focus from us. Look at what happened to the disciples. They were gathered in one place, they were waiting and waiting and waiting for something to happen. In a moment, in a flash, something did happen. They were seized by the spirit, they were captured and changed, and they lost control. There was not a meeting after the Holy Spirit arrived to decide if they wanted to speak in other languages. There was no vision statement, no mission statement to give the disciples direction. No, the Holy Spirit just took control and the disciples followed.

We may be sitting and wondering and waiting thinking this is it, but this isn't it. This isn't the end of our journey with Christ. This isn't the end of our experience with the divine, but the beginning of the next part. This is part two, the entrance of the Holy Spirit, the beginning of this movement known as the church. We are waiting for the second, the entrance, the new experience of the Holy Spirit. Open yourself to the experience of the Holy Spirit, and get ready for part II.

We can have those moments in our spirituality and in our life. We can have those moments when we feel the Holy Spirit surround us, seize us and lead us in our actions. We can have those moments when we speak without thinking and the words are profound. We can have those moments when we walk home a different way than we normally do, just because it felt right, and on the way home we run into someone in need who we can help. We can have those moments when we feel like taking a chance with a relationship even though all reason suggests otherwise. It is that moment in prayer when you feel something around you, when you feel something in you, and you know that God is there. Maybe you remember that first moment, that moment when you first gave your life to Christ, and you felt yourself baptized by the Holy Spirit. Maybe you felt the Holy Spirit entering into you, gracing you and blessing you. That is the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth Johnson calls the Holy Spirit the wisdom of God. The spirit is the creative and all-knowing presence of our Lord. It is the breath, the wind that sweeps around us and transforms us. In 1801, in Cane Ridge, KY, thousands of people felt the Holy Spirit. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and others gathered for a revival and were seized by the spirit. Some spoke in tongues, some were filled with ecstatic emotions, and others found themselves falling on the ground without any control in their bodies. They experienced the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will come.

The Holy Spirit will come and grab us.

The Holy Spirit will come and grab us and take away our control.

The Holy Spirit will come and grab us and take away our control and set us on fire!

The Holy Spirit will come.

Keep yourself open because the Holy Spirit will come and take the focus from us and we start and we head into the new stage in our journey with Christ.

Movement 4 – Witnessing

The Spirit will lead us to proclaim Christ's name. We start witnessing, we start praising, we start proclaiming Christ's name, and Christ's glory. When the Holy Spirit grabs us, we find ourselves sharing Christ with others, in very specific ways. Before, the disciples were just waiting. Before, the disciples were just in a holding pattern, circling around the event of Christ's resurrection and ascension. If one were to ask them about Jesus, they may have said that Jesus was an extraordinary person, a great person who changed their lives. They would have shared about Jesus, but only a surface level, and only an individual level. Yet today we begin a new chapter of the disciple's journey and the disciple's life. Today the disciples begin to witness to the world what Christ means to them. Today they start to tell the world about redemption, about grace, and about the new day that has arrived through Jesus Christ. We only hear the beginning of Peter's sermon. We only have heard the first part, when he tells of a new day that has begun, the Lord's Day. He continues to tell about Jesus Christ, about what Christ has done for all of them. Peter shares with the world about Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit grabs us, we also find ourselves sharing Christ with the world, we find ourselves proclaiming Christ's name. Maybe we have also been circling around the resurrection and the ascension wondering what to do next. Maybe we have been wondering who we were to be as people who have been touched and transformed by Jesus. Someone might grab a wondering, a circling bunch of believers and give them a particular vision that is not completely in line with Christ. Stay steadfast, and wait for that second part of the journey, the part when we are seized by the Spirit, and we find ourselves witnessing the name and the power of Jesus. We find ourselves telling others not so much what Christ has done for us, but what Christ has done and can do for them. The theologian Avery Dullis describes the church in a number of ways one of which is as a herald. The church is the herald of Christ, telling the world about Christ in a similar way that the disciples tell the world.

This is the beginning of our vision and of our purpose that we are to declare Christ's name to the world. We are to tell the world that there is grace, that there is redemption, and there is salvation. We are to tell the world that we no longer need to control our lives, that we no longer need to fear in our lives because death has been beaten, life is offered and we can live to see tomorrow. We are to declare Christ's name to the world.

It may not be through words, it may be through actions, it may be through presence, it may be through a way you brush against someone else, but when you are led by the Holy Spirit,

you will begin to witness. Your witness will transcend the social and cultural boundaries that you know and are comfortable in. Your witness will have its own language that you may not even recognize. Your witness will be profound and you will speak of the cross in a way that shares the grace and the love of the Lord. You will become a witness through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will descend upon us, will wrap around us, transform us, and we will start proclaiming Christ's name to the world.

Movement 5 – The New Paradigm

And the unexpected will happen. Things will happen that we will not expect. I have hinted toward this, I have already suggested this when I said you will share Christ in ways you have not previously expected. You will share Christ in ways that may not seem to make sense; you will become the disciples that no one has expected to see, we will become a church that no one expected.

It starts with the tongues of fire, it moves onto the proclamation in ways never expected, but this is just the beginning, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The amazing signs of the Holy Spirit is just the beginning of the new thing we are all called to be a part of. We to will be washed with fire. We to will be able to share Christ's love with anyone no matter what boundaries of language, geography, or culture may get in the way.

This is a new day, this is the Lord's Day, and a new vision is give to us. As a people, as God's people seized by the Spirit all of us, brothers and sisters will prophesy, our young shall see visions and the old shall dream. The young, the dreamers, the ones who think of the impossible will be the ones who will offer a vision for the church to follow and to live into. The old, the ones who have the life experience, the ones who have the wisdom to offer a vision that is practical and realistic will offer the dreams of the impossible for the church to live into. The young shall have visions and the old shall have dreams.

All of God's children, men and women, will have visions, will dream dreams and will proclaim the name of the Lord. Do you hear the difference in this way of being church? Do you hear a new way proclaimed. This is not the way things are supposed to happen. Previously, God's word was spoken by a small number of people, power holders, and older men. This is the ideal of the world. It is the ideal of the world to make sure that only a certain amount of people are in control. It is the ideal of the world to ensure that the vision of the church would only come from a handful of people. Previously, the word of the Lord was shared by those who have studied those who have worked hard to earn the respect of the world.

But today, we have fishermen, we have merchants, and we have tax collectors standing in the midst of the world and proclaiming the name of the Lord. Today we have women and children standing with the men, we have the old and young, we have the high school graduates, the high school students proclaiming the name of the Lord. The work, the vision and the leadership of the church is open to all people in the church. It is a radical universalism that leads us and informs us as a people. This is part II. This is a new day; it is a new part of the life of the church.

Be ready for anything. Be ready for the crazy idea that someone has, and for that idea to come to fruition. Be ready for the long shot to come to actuality. Be ready for the child's words to be the exact words that we need to hear in order to continue to live into God's grace. Be ready for anything.

A year ago, if you asked me if it was possible for a smaller church to organize a mission trip I would have said, "No." If you asked me a year ago if it was possible for this church to go

the Mississippi and proclaim the name of the Lord I would have thought it to be impossible. I would have said that we do not have the people; we do not have the resources. Yet today we are going to Mississippi to share the love and the grace of the Lord. Today we are sending seven people on behalf of the church to be with the hurting, the suffering and the destitute. Today we are doing the unexpected, we are doing that which others would say a church of our size should not be doing – we are proclaiming the name of the Lord.

It is a new day; it is a new chapter of our walk with Christ. This is part II, when we are seized by the Holy Spirit, when we are captured by the fire of the Lord and we start to go and share the name of Christ in new ways, in different ways, and in unexpected ways. Christ said, the first shall be last and the last shall be first, and in this day, in this new day, we can see and experience and live those words as we are transformed by the Holy Spirit. The models of the world are turned upside down, the unexpected will happen, the unexpected is happening.

Movement 6 – God’s Vision

And we share God’s vision. We share God’s plan. This is not our plan. This is not the world’s plan. This is God’s plan. If we were to organize ourselves in the way of the world we would form a board of directors, we would choose a small group of people to lead us, and we would take about growth, and long-term sustainability. But this is not our vision, for our vision is not ours. This church is not ours, it is God’s community gathered and led by the Holy Spirit. It was God’s Part I and it is God’s Part II. It was the Holy Spirit that first sparked the 19 original members to give their lives to Christ, not a gimmick or a well thought out vision. It was the Holy Spirit that brought Horatio Gates Jones to preach the word. It was the Holy Spirit that continued to change and challenge and make this church what it is. It is the Holy Spirit that we continue to hope in and trust and it is from that Spirit that we receive God’s vision.

Mirsolv Volf says that the church is present when, as it says in Matthew 18, two or three is gathered in Christ’s name. Volf says that when these are gathered, the Holy Spirit is present and something happens that is greater than those who are present. That is what happens with us each time we gather, the Holy Spirit is present and it is greater than any one of us, and makes great all of us and leads us to God’s glory. This is the new part of the story, this is the new day of the story that the Holy Spirit has gathered us, has embraced us, and shows us where to go. We need to keep ourselves open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need to have an idea where we are going, we need to have some sense of where we are going, but let that idea, let that direction come from God through the actions of Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Let our vision be that of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will bring us, show us and drive us to what we are supposed to do. We’ve come this far, we’ve experienced this much, and now, the next part begins, the part when we proclaim to the world the hope of Christ in the way that Christ calls us to proclaim. We’ve come this far and now we start part II.

We are there as a church. We are there as a people. We are entering into a new day as a church and as a people. We are entering into a new time, God’s time and where we will head, I don’t know. But it will be God’s vision, God’s leading through the Holy Spirit, with Christ ahead of us. We will enter into this new time, into God’s time.

My brother’s and sisters I have a vision. It is a vision of a church that opens its doors to all the nations. It is a vision of a church where people who speak different languages come and worship. It is a vision of a church where the people of the nations gather, and when we worship the event that happened at Babal, the bringing down and casting out of the people is reversed, and we are brought together and we speak the language of praise and witness the love of Christ,

and all understand our words. I have a vision of that day, of the Lord's Day when we as a church listen to and follow all of our members, the young and the old, men and women, all of our members into the will of the Lord. I have a vision of the church that proclaims to the world that Christ has died, that Christ lives, that Christ will come again and in this hope we have life, we have grace and we have been redeemed. I have a vision; it is God's vision of who we are to be as a church.

We can have that vision because we have been revived. We have been made new, we have been made into a holy people by the Lord. Pray for that vision of where we will go from here. Take a chance and live into that vision. We again and again fall into our own vision, we walk the path we choose, not the path that God sets for us, and we fall into the life of the world. Ask God to be revived. Ask God to be brought back into this new day, this new time and this new life. We all need to say out loud that we need to be revived. Revive us again, Lord. Revive us to your hope and your glory. Revive us again, Lord. Hallelujah, thine the glory! Revive us again!

AMEN