

Fulfilling the Vision
Acts 2:14-21

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God said, “I will pour out my spirit on all kinds of people and your sons and daughters will prophesy and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams and whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” A vision. Without it a church flounders and with it a church flourishes. A vision is, in essence, a picture of God’s preferred future. And the vision I want to share with you today is as old as the prophet Joel, as powerful as the one on the day of Pentecost and is as current as the morning news.

The hand of God is upon us. The same God who encountered Moses at the burning bush, called Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and empowered the early church to change the world, is calling us to be faithful. It takes the hand of God to accomplish the purposes of God. Let me repeat that again. It takes the hand of God to accomplish the purposes of God. It has always been that way. In Deuteronomy 5:15 Moses says to the children of Israel, *Remember God brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm.* Nehemiah 2:8 says, *The gracious hand of my God is upon me to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.* Luke reports in Acts 11:21, *The Lord’s hand was with them and a great number of people believed.*

One of the first things I was asked to do upon becoming your pastor 18 months ago was to cast a vision for this congregation. Let me say to you that what lies before you is not Howard’s vision. The hand of God has been upon this church since its founding 150 years ago. All I am trying to do is to articulate it. Somehow in the design of things, God decided that Brentwood United Methodist would be a large membership church. Somehow in the tides of times, God decided that it would not be built around a particular pastor. Once more, in the development of things, we are asked to follow the footsteps of the faithful. Will those who come behind us find us committed?

With the hand of God upon us, hearts are being touched. Maybe it is too early to tell, but I contend that something changed in American society on September 11, 2001. Materialism is giving way to meaning. Isolation is being abandoned for community. I think we woke up that tragic day to discover that “making it” is not everything and self-sufficiency is severely limited. *Sometimes we need to go where they always know your name and sometimes you need to be where they are always glad you came.*

We hunger for community. And if you want to know where community happens here, it happens in the group life of this church. It happens in Sunday School, Bible Studies, Disciple Bible Study groups, and in the fellowship groups that make up this congregation. If you want to know caring happens in the church, it

happens in the same place. I have witnessed it. I have stood in the hospital and watched it and by the graveside and experienced it as people surrounded others in caring ways. If you want to know where compassion is expressed in this church, then look to the group life, the activities, the opportunities, the study and fellowship that are available for every age group along the way. Why some people would rather go to Sunday School than to hear me preach. I cannot imagine that! And you know what? I really do understand it because that is where belonging happens here.

The hand of God in upon us. Touching hearts where they hurt. The hand of God is upon us transforming lives into what they were created to be. Do you realize that in this month alone nearly one hundred young people will make a profession of faith, be confirmed and become a part of this congregation? Do you realize that the average worship attendance in Protestant churches across America is eighty-nine people on Sunday morning? Did you get what I just said? A whole new church just came into being in the last 30 days. It says something about the faithfulness of you as parents, who stood here like the Guinn family today and made promises to be faithful in rearing your children. It also says something about the faithfulness of the church to be there to help form and fashion individuals.

These are the presidents, legislators, business leaders, lawyers, doctors, teachers and pastors of the future! These people will shape and form society. What people will believe and how we act as a world is happening right here—right now, this moment. Sometimes it is slow and gradual and you hardly see it. Sometimes it is dramatic and fast.

*“Twas battered and scarred and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
“What am I bidden, good folks,” he cried,
“Who’ll start the bidding for me?”
“A dollar, a dollar;” then, “Two!” “Only two?
Two dollars and who’ll make it three?
Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three—” But no,
From the room far back, a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
And tightening the loose strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet as a caroling angel sings.*

*The music ceased and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: “What am I bid for the old violin?”
And he held it up with the bow.*

*“A thousand dollars, and who’ll make it two?
Two thousand! And who’ll make it three?
Three thousand once, three thousand twice
And going and gone,” said he.
The people cheered but some of them cried,
“We do not quite understand
What changed its worth.” Quick came the reply:
“The touch of the master’s hand.”*

*And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A “mess of pottage,” a glass of wine;
A game— and he travels on.
He is “going” once, and “going” twice,
He’s “going” and almost “gone.”
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that’s wrought by the Touch of the Master’s
hand.
The hand of God transformed a life.*

The Spirit of God is within us. On the day of Pentecost they came from different cultures and countries. On the day of Pentecost they arrived with their own opinions and persuasions. On the day of Pentecost they had seen their share of troubles and had carried their share of burdens. Something happened that day, that transformed the world. A crowd of complex, diverse, highly opinionated people united because the Holy Spirit descended upon them and so filled them that the world was revolutionized. I pray for that kind of spirit to descend upon us today. Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire. That is my prayer.

The Spirit unites us. The Spirit inspires, excites, and thrills us. On Easter Sunday we had visitors from China in one of our services. They were delightful people and at a luncheon the next day, one of our members asked their impressions of our worship service. Of course, they were complimentary. However, the Chinese pastor who was among the group said, “You know, if I jumped around like Dr. Olds does in the pulpit on Sunday morning, they would think I was drunk with whiskey.” You realize that the bystanders on Pentecost Sunday thought the disciples were drunk with cheap wine. But Peter said, “These people are not drunk as some of you suspect. It is just 9:00 o’clock in the morning.”

I need to tell you, I’m not drunk on Kentucky bourbon, but I am high on the Spirit. I am passionate about life. I got a chance to live and I want to live it all. I have a deep devotion to the Lord. I just want to do whatever it is God wants us to do together. I am thrilled at the opportunity to know you and to make this

journey with you. I deeply believe God touches people's hearts to make a difference for good in the world. Do it according to your personality, but let the Spirit get a hold of you today.

The Spirit of the living God is within us. The power of the living God is beneath us, lifting us, moving us. Some of you are pilots. I know absolutely nothing about flying an airplane, but I know that airplanes are different from any other means of transportation. Cars, trains, and boats can come to a complete stop and back up, but it's not so with an aircraft. If it loses forward momentum, it begins to fall and great is the fall of it. The only safe direction for an airplane is onward and upward.

There is a principle in business which says you cannot stand still. Either you are moving forward or you are falling back. That principle applies to churches as well. For the last 5 years this church has quivered on a plateau. Now, plateaus are not bad. In fact, they are an important moment in history. You need some time to assess and see where you are. Plateaus can become pinnacles of nostalgia by which we remember the good old days, or they become launching pads for new ministries. I want to be on the launching pad. How about you?

I want to scale the utmost height and catch a glimpse of glory bright. Though some may dwell where these abound, my prayer, my aim is higher ground.

I plan to fly. I hope you are onboard in the process. The power of God lifts. The power of God stretches us. I do not know what it has been like in your life, but the Lord always asks from me more than I think I have to give. I think that every Sunday when I step into this pulpit. I never ever fail to feel how absolutely inadequate I am to do this job when I climb these steps every Sunday. But stretching is the way that God pulls us to our full potential. Oh yes, sometimes it makes you sore. I used to play intense basketball games with my two boys and I still try to do it even though I have gotten old. After we have had one of those push and shove basketball games, my physician son says to me, "Well, Dad, if you would stretch, you wouldn't be so sore the next day." And I suspect that is true. In life, if we are going to be all God wants us to be, we are going to have to stretch. If we are going to give all God wants us to give, we are going to have to stretch. It is by stretching that we become God's instrument in the world.

So I ask you, "*What if?*"

What if Peter had said 5,000 is enough?

What if Paul had said I don't baptize Gentiles?

What if Martin Luther said I don't buck the system; I'm not leading any Reformation?

What if Wesley had said let America take care of America; I don't bother with America?

What if Asbury had said the frontier is too rough and rugged and people are only going to live out there about 35 years? *What if* he said it was too much and

decided not to come to Tennessee?

What if Robert I. Moore had said I've given enough?

So, I leave you with this prayer found in the tiny book of Jude: "Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of His glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever." Amen.

