**A New Vision** Act 11:1-18; Revelations 21:1-6

How many of you have ever had a really vivid dream? One when you can hear yourself saying things, where you recognize the people in the dream, or the place where it occurs, and when things are in so much detail that you almost wonder if it is real?

Put you hand up if you have!

And don’t worry if you didn’t put your hand up, because I can tell you that even if you don’t remember dreaming – you did! In fact, research has shown that the average person has between 3 to 5 dreams per night. Scientifically the most vivid dreams occur during what is called a Rapid Eye Movement stage of sleep (a REM period) when the brain activity resembles that of being awake.

So, if you didn’t remember your dream, it’s probably just because you didn’t dream during that period!

A study of dreams is fascinating. There has been much written about the content and the purpose of dreams. I’m sure many of you are familiar with the name Sigmund Freud - he wrote extensively about the theory of dreams, and how they reveal hidden desires and emotions.

 Other prominent theories include those suggesting that dreams assist in memory formation, and problem solving.

In many indigenous cultures, dreams serve as a validation of one's spiritual condition. According to the Anishinaabe people, children learn from an early age to remember their dreams. These dreams are then interpreted by the tribal elders, who reveal the symbols in the dreams that guide the dreamer to deeper wisdom and sometimes spiritual healing.

Although an understanding of dreams is not definitive, and you might think that it is all nonsense – you can not deny that has been a topic of scientific speculation, and the subject of philosophical and religious interest, throughout history – including biblical history!

Our faith heritage story is full of dreams and visions. To name just a few:

* Jacob’s dream of the ladder, and the wrestling with God
* Nebuchadnezzar’s two dreams in the book of Daniel
* Joseph’s many dreams – which we probably all familiar with thanks to Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical
* In the gospel of Matthew there are five recorded dreams around the Holy family and the birth of Jesus
* Pilate’s wife shares a dream with her husband about sparing Jesus’ life
* The book of Revelations opens with a series of visions
* And of course – Peter’s dream recorded here in Acts 11.

Prophetic dreams and visions are back bone of our faith tradition.

But, how are they relevant to us today?

Theologian and Hebrew scholar, Walter Bruggeman, in his book ‘Prophetic Imagination’ says that we can lean a lot from the ancient dreams and visions of our faith story. He writes:

  *“The task is reframing so that we can re-experience the social realities that are right in front of us from a different angle.”*

In an interview Brueggemann said that he would always tell his students as they were studying the prophets, *“that this stuff sounds like it was written yesterday because the contemporary nature of it is so immediate.”*

Peter’s vision is most certainly contemporary.

Peter had a very vivid and detailed dream – and one that he clearly remembered when he woke up! As he reports his vision step by step to the Jewish disciples, he tells them how he heard God speaking to him in his vision, saying it is ok to eat non kosha food. He says:

 *The voice from heaven spoke, saying, ‘Never consider unclean what God has made pure.’ (v 9)*

And he goes on to say that in his vision, he is told to go into the house of the uncircumcised Gentiles:

 *The Spirit told me to go with them even though they were Gentiles. (v.12)*

This was ground-breaking stuff. The Jews and the Gentiles were very separate cultures. They didn’t mix – hence ‘*EVEN THOUGH they were Gentiles’* . At this point, the disciples did not believe that the Gentiles should even be part of the early church – they thought that they were like a small elite group and that the gospel that Jesus proclaimed was just for them!

You sometimes have to wonder where they were when Jesus told them to “love your neighbour as yourself.”

Peter’s vision helps them to understand that the Gentiles are their neighbours.

His vision shows them the future of the early church.

What vision do we have of our future?

In 2015, Disney released a movie called ‘Tomorrowland’. In it they depict a future city for 2050 – take a look at this.

(insert movie clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWLJ1hR-Mk4&ab_channel=SoleTubeEntertainment>)

There you have it – 2050! Well, of course I have no idea if we will be flying around with jetpacks, or travelling in hover-rails in the sky. Although it is likely that by 2050 most of us will be driving electric cars.

Sadly, it is also predicted that if we do not do anything about the climate crises, then environmental disasters will become common place, many animals and aquatic life will become extinct, and parts of the world will become uninhabitable by 2050. We can see this happening already – just recently in the news Pakistan record temperatures of 47 degrees: the heat closed schools, damaged crops; put pressure on energy supplies; residents were warned to remain indoors and keep hydrated.

The prophetic words of environmentalists like Greta Thunberg need to heeded, just like Peter’s vision for the early church.

And what vision do we have for the future of our church today?

This is a particularly poignant question for you at Grace United as you start the process of looking for a new minister. This process begins with asking yourselves the question of what vision do you have for this Community of Faith.

Some of you may have different visions, but it is important for you to work together to create a common vision. It’s important that all voices are heard on the search team.

Who are you? What is your identity? What is your vision?

As you work together, there may be some things that you have to let go of to make way for the new. I am sure that 5 years ago you never would have imagined that you would use PowerPoint in place of bulletins. Or having Disney clips as part of the message.

It’s OK to let go of some things. The vision in Revelations reading today reminds us that there should be “*no mourning, crying, or pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:4)*

But as you consider your vision for this church, it is also important to know that there may be things that you will need to own, and to carry with you that are part of your roots and your identity.

You have probably it heard it said that the United Church is like a big tent- with many different theological views from the conservative to the more progressive. And, neither of those standpoints are wrong, or even opposing, as long as God, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is the post that holds up the tent.

I know that the days ahead may seem a little uncertain for you at Grace, and the vision may not yet be clear. But I do believe that God is preparing someone to come and be your minister.

I encourage you to hold onto the promise that God is “*the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end”(v.6).* As you create a search team, and begin your process of moving forward, keep God as the post in the center of your vision. Always be thirsty for God. And as you step into a new phase for Grace, remember *“To the thirsty God will freely give water from the life-giving spring.”(v.6)*

Amen.