

“Dreams and Visions, Groans and Sighs”

Acts 2:1-4, 12-21; Romans 8:22-27

Okay, before we begin our consideration of the Scriptures, there is one very important question that has been on the minds of many of our fellow Americans this past week: **“Laurel or Yanny?”** In case you’ve been in seclusion, hiding under a rock, or simply have chosen NOT to pay attn. to all this craziness, it all started when a HS freshman in GA, in her world lit class, looked up the word **“laurel”** on Vocabulary.com, and played the audio. (Remember the old days when you actually READ a dictionary?) And what SHE heard was not the word ‘laurel,’ but that very popular term, ‘yanny.’ After polling her fellow students as to what THEY heard, she posted the audio on Instagram. And after that, due to the wonders of social media (and people who obviously have way too much time IN their hands) the rest is history. Well, *meaningless* history, at least...

So, just what does this most **IN-significant** event (or as that fact-finding site known as “Snopes” referred to it, an example of the “Internet having lost its collective mind”) have to do with the observance of Pentecost ... that most **significant** event most commonly referred to at the ‘church’s birthday?’ Well, just as a lot of ‘web surfers’ were thought to have ‘lost their collective minds,’ so too did some observers of those Spirit-filled early believers think THEM to have ‘lost their minds’... perhaps with a little help from the ‘intoxication’ of some fermented grape... as opposed to that of the Internet...

But more importantly, this seemingly inane happening might actually serve a higher purpose. (Aside from being a brief diversion from all of the seriously BAD news we are bombarded with!) For at its core, this ‘controversy’ relates to the manner in which **different people**, with different backgrounds, abilities, **voices...** are **seeking to understand** -- the **struggle** to **interpret** a common language. That **‘small still voice’** that helps you to **know** that **what** you are **hearing** is **correct...** the right **answer** to what you are **seeking**.

This, in a nutshell, is the story of Pentecost. **Different people...** with different backgrounds, different abilities, different **voices...** seeking to **understand** one another. The

struggle that they had in **interpreting** each other's different language... a challenge they embraced because of the 'language' that they shared in **common**: a **love for God** in the person of **Jesus Christ**. And because of the **presence** of that 'small still voice'... aka, the "Holy Spirit"... those early followers of Christ could **know** that what they were hearing was correct... unlike our human attempts to understand

Now, I am NOT saying that the HS is getting involved in the auditory interpretation of electronic 'voices' via the Internet. What I AM saying is that just as those early 'church members' had a lot of voices coming at them that they couldn't have understood without the help of the Spirit, so too do WE, Christ's 'body' today, have a lot of 'voices' coming at us that we need the Spirit's help to understand.

Sometimes those may be the voices of our fellow man and woman that we SURE need help in understanding. But most of the time, they are unknown voices, speaking to us in our **present** situations, as well as about our **future** ones. And we too must call on that same Spirit in facing our **trials** in the **present**, as we embrace our **hope** for the **future**. A 'Spirit' that works in MANY more ways other than as a miraculous 'interpreter' for diverse 1st Century believers...

In our Scriptures today, the Apostle Paul addressed how the Holy Spirit of God intercedes with us 'saints' through "Groans and Sighs" in our **present** day struggles. You may remember the words from our Call to Confession earlier in the service: *"...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes [for us] with sighs too deep for words."* (Romans 8:26) Earlier Paul speaks of how we *"groan inwardly while we wait."*

Who among us cannot relate to these descriptions? And I DON'T just mean in the statement that I resonated with so: to 'groan inwardly while we wait'... as 'in TRAFFIC!' Or, 'on hold on the phone.' Or, 'in waiting rooms.' More seriously, how many of us have faced 'weakness' this week... of mind, body, or spirit? **[hand raised]** How many of us have struggled... perhaps even in THIS service... with that conviction, 'I do not know how to pray as I ought?' **[hand raised again!]**

When we think of the power of the Holy Spirit... especially as it was manifest on this Pentecost Sunday... we can find ourselves preoccupied with the more dramatic, mysterious,

even a little bit *scary* demonstrations of the Spirit's power. You know, miracles like healing, exorcism, speaking in *tongues*... which are indeed very powerful examples of the working of God's Spirit. But we should by NO MEANS neglect the everyday, in-the-trenches presence of the Spirit. The Spirit that is there when we just don't have the words to say to God in prayer... or the words to say to one of God's children. The Spirit that is there as we 'groan'... both inwardly AND outwardly... while we wait for God's deliverance from difficult, trying times in our lives. The Spirit that is there even though unseen. And, in Paul words, ***"if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*** (Romans 8:25)

Whoa. 'Patience?' Remember what I said 'groaning while we wait?' Well, Paul also said that you and I ***"have the first fruits of the Spirit."*** (Romans 8:23) And what are the 'fruits of the Spirit?' Healing? Exorcism? Speaking tongues? ***"The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*** (Galatians 5:22-23) Yes, even patience. ☺ These are ALL Spiritual 'fruit' that you and I are called to 'bear' in our present-day witness to God's love for us. Fruits that you ALL 'in-deed' bear many of...

In addition to the Holy Spirit being a ***"very present help in trouble,"*** God can speak to us through the Spirit about what is to come. The ancient prophet Joel spoke to how the Spirit inspired young and old alike with "Dreams and Visions" of the **future**. As I began my ministry here in SW LA, one of my foundational Scriptures has been from one of Joel's 'colleagues in prophecy,' Jeremiah: ***"For I know the plans I have for you' declares the Lord; 'plans not to harm you, but to prosper you. Plans to give you hope, and a future."*** (Jeremiah 29:11)

And just how are WE to come to know those 'plans?' How are we to gain that 'hope' that the Lord has planned for us? To call on the name of the Lord to 'pour out His Spirit' upon ALL of His 'fleshly' creation. **[LC:** It is my belief that many of you have already been doing this in the days, the YEARS, that have brought us to this point; that in selling our previous property... though some might have thought you to be 'filled with new wine'... it was indeed the Spirit that inspired a **vision** for the future. And for HEAVEN'S sake, don't stop now!

Because with the 'benediction' of the Corps of Engineers, this 'vision' is now going to start getting REAL!] Even more, you 'sons and daughters' need to ***"see visions"*** and ***"dream dreams"*** for God's Church. More than ever, we need MORE 'prophetic voices' in the church to

lead us forward... [LC: *“before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day”* on which we worship for the first time at the Harvest Community Center.] We need to be in prayer, and in action, to draw in more workers in our efforts to reap those ‘fields that are ripe for the harvest.’ Whether inspiring our vision and drive for the future... or sustaining us in our present weakness and doubt ...we need to pray for the presence of God in our lives. A ‘presence’ also known as the Comforter, the Advocate... the Spirit of God and of Truth. A Spirit that is most often, to borrow from the theater, NOT ‘center stage’... but rather, ‘behind the scenes.’ A Spirit at work both in ‘lead roles’... and in ‘supporting cast’....

In speaking of those who have played ‘lead roles,’ you have no doubt seen the bulletin insert concerning that well-known icon for children’s TV programming, Mr. Rogers. On this Heritage Sunday, in which we remember the impact of our Presbyterian Heritage on our world, it is only fitting to remember a Presbyterian... an ordained minister at that... whose life was lived in order to make a positive ‘impact’ on our world... and in particular, the lives of young people. A native of Latrobe PA (also the hometown of a golfer you may have heard of -- Arnold Palmer), Fred Rogers was a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and was ordained in 1962 to a most unusual ‘call’... called with the charge of ‘working with children and families through the media.’ (His was a ‘validated ministry’ LONG before that became a ‘thing’ in our denomination...)

Faithful to that call, “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” debuted in 1968... 50 years ago this past February. And even though he passed away just over 15 years ago (also in Feb.), his legacy still lives on in today’s ‘media ministry’... “Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood” is a current animated show based on a character from his original series. Echoing those words of Eva Stimson at the end of that bulletin insert, Fred Rogers “never served in a traditional role of pastor, but through television [brought] his **simple message** of **affirmation** and **acceptance** to a ‘congregation’ of millions.”

As I sought to know my ‘colleague’ a little better, I read over some of his more noteworthy quotes. Here are a few:

“If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. **There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person.**”

“**The connections we make in the course of a life--maybe that's what heaven is.**”

☺ “**The child is in me still ... and sometimes not so still.**”

“We live in a world in which we need to **share responsibility**. It's easy to say "It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem." Then **there are those who see the need and respond**. I consider those people my heroes.”

(Perhaps his most well-known) “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “**Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.**”

Unlike another minister who also impacted millions with a simple message... Billy Graham... Rev. Fred Rogers was not a fiery orator or pastor to world leaders. He was a quiet, rather unassuming man best known for his attire of tennis shoes and a button-up sweater. He was a simple servant of God who specialized in lifting up the importance of Children. Kind of like a 1st Century carpenter’s son from Nazareth. Both of whom were empowered by “**the Spirit who intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**” It is that same Spirit, my fellow saints, that can use YOU to do God’s will; probably not like Billy Graham, but to, in your own unique way, ‘preach the Gospel of Mr. Rogers’—the message of **affirmation** and **acceptance**. And for your efforts to be filled and used by the Holy Spirit, you WILL be rewarded with the TRUE ‘laurel’...the ‘laurel of victory’ over death in Jesus Christ... And all God’s Spirit-filled children said, ‘AMEN!’

CHARGE

The Problems with understanding in our example of ‘Laurel and Yanny’ came from hearing, rather than reading. In order for us to better overcome any problems in understanding God’s will for LIFE – don’t just listen. Don’t believe everything you hear. READ His Word. And THEN listen...

1)“... **Life** is far **more** than **anything** you can ever **see** or **hear** or **touch**. That **deep part of you** that **allows you** to **stand** for those things without which humankind cannot survive. **Love** that conquers hate, **peace** that rises triumphant over war, and **justice** that proves more powerful than greed.” (Rev. Fred Rogers)

On this Pentecost Sunday, on which we have pondered just what it means to be **‘in the Spirit,’** may you remember these words of a Pres. Minister far wiser than I.

‘Life IS far more than anything you can ever SEE, or HEAR, or TOUCH.

And may that comforting Presence of God, aka the Holy Spirit, TRULY BE that

‘deep part of you that allows you to stand... for love ... peace... justice.

More quotes from Mr. Rogers:

“Often when you think you're at the end of something, you're at the beginning of something else.”

“I hope you're proud of yourself for the times you've said "yes," when all it meant was extra work for you and was seemingly helpful only to someone else.”

“(No matter our ‘age or stage’) we human beings **all** want to know that we're **acceptable**, that our being alive somehow **makes a difference** in the **lives of others.**”