

**Hear now a reading from the First Letter to the Corinthians 12:1-6**

**12** Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup>You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. <sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.<sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

**This ends the reading from First Corinthians. Thanks be to God.**

Chances are, when you were a kid, you had a list of things that you wanted to do when you grew up. As you grew older, many of those things were probably scratched off your list either because you achieved the goal or perhaps because you lost interest over time. Maybe you realized you weren't gifted to become the next Olympic runner; maybe you realized you just didn't have an enduring passion to cure cancer; maybe you realized you needed a balance of life and work, of reality and hope.

So I want to ask you -- What are you doing now? Was the thing you do now on your list? Did you know that approximately two-thirds of Americans hate what they're doing for a living and feel like they're not making any lasting contribution to the world? In recent years, there have been a ton of books on living a life where you chase your dreams, but it's clear that we live in a society where most people are not living out what they'd always hoped they would.

You were once an expert at dreaming about your future, but along the way, you settled for something else. Something that might have seemed safer. But instinctively, you know there is something else you should be doing. Some other way you could be making a difference in the world. This is true whether you are in the middle of your career choices or if you are now retired and choosing how you dedicate your days. There are still dreams to fulfil.

I want you to connect with that list of dreams again. I want you to connect with the list of dreams you have for yourself and for our church. This is our season of stewardship – or, said another way – this is our season of discovering what are dreams are made of.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Joel has been talking about a horrible plague of locusts which devastated the fields and crops and wiped out what was once a fertile land to now a desert of waste. Joel describes what is happening around them – the land, the economy, the people. Not unlike what is happening around us even today. The environment, the economy, the divisiveness of the people. The gun violence, the poverty, the oppression. The Prophet Joel says – you can't address it until you name it. So, name it.

This calling out what is happening has a way of making us uncomfortable, yes? It's so much easier to put on our blinders during the day; it's so much easier to close the door to our heart and ignore the moment and the anger and the crisis. As many prophets before him, Joel has that way of afflicting the comfortable – to make us squirm and come up with a list of excuses.

So it's a good thing that Joel doesn't stop there. Joel also wants us to know there is hope and that we, the people of God, have the ability, have the power and blessing to create a new future. He says these famous words: "God will pour out the Holy Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams and your young daughters shall see visions."

Indeed, the message is one of both-and. You must see and know and name the circumstances and problems of the world AND you must dream the dream of hope and fullness; of love and reconciliation.

It is hard to believe but this is my fifth year here among you, walking this journey with you. Five years. To me it is a blink of an eye. So fast, it has gone by so very, very fast.

January 2012 I was invited as a guest preacher to worship with you. Do you remember?

You were generous and kind. We were worshipping in the round, in a circle of pews. Jean Vickers was about to move to Fremont; Lee and Margie Cavanaugh were spry and spoke of Mary Kester's failing health during prayers; Lucille Edlund was singing in the choir, yes, many of our saints were among us that day. My friend Carolyn joined Cheryl to offer support on this new thing. As I recall there were 18 of us in all. I don't remember if it was Ed or Ron who set up the projector and the screen and then ran the slide show from a card table in front of the pulpit.

After worship, during fellowship, Kevin, who was your Moderator at the time, invited the members of the Church Council to meet with me. Cheryl and I joined you in the Gansberger Chapel.

We talked for a bit. You needed somebody, I could hear God telling me that I might just be that somebody. After some conversation, you all looked at one another and basically said, okay, sure, we'll give you a go. There were already conversations about the prospect that the church might close in the next two or three months. You had been doing the hard work of talking about transitions and options; you had been finding spiritual guidance for the role of this church in this community.

Of course from my perspective, I had been advised before coming that, indeed, this church would be closing; so, really, I was here as pulpit supply and pastoral care – and wouldn't get much of either since this was a fractional call – only 10 hours a week. You remember. You were there. My promise to you at the time, my vision for my role at the time was that I would walk with you wherever and for however long you wanted to walk together, I would walk with you.

After the meeting, Cheryl told me I talked too much -- like I was a little bit TOO excited about the whole thing since it was going to be over and done in a flash. And, well, now you know me yourself and know that Cheryl was right, I probably did talk too much that first meeting and, much to my chagrin, I have talked too much at every Council meeting since then. I almost always talk too much – such is the burden of being a preacher with a microphone!

So we have been walking together. And here we are five years later. And what, pray tell, is the secret for going five years when we were so close to closing the doors and selling the land?

(pause)

There was a man who had a dream one night that he had died. In his dream he found himself in a large room. The room had a very large banquet table filled with different kinds of food. There were people seated around the table but they were seated five feet away from the table. In his dream, the people were very hungry and wanted to eat but were unable to get out of their chairs. To make matters worse their arms were not long enough to be able to reach out and obtain the food.

As the man looked more closely, he saw a very large spoon that was five feet long that the people were fighting over for possession. In his dream, he watched with amazement how one person used the spoon to dish up some food and then carefully turned the spoon around toward his mouth with all the food falling off the spoon and onto the floor.

Then another person grabbed the spoon but was unable to feed himself because of the length of the spoon. Then the man turned to his guide and said: "This is not good; to have food and not be able to eat it. If this is humanity, I want no part of it. There has to be something else."

The guide replied, "Indeed, this is not your place. Come with me."

The guide took him to another room that was also filled with a large banquet table and delicious food. In this room, there was also a large spoon with a handle that was five feet long. However, in this room no one was fighting. Instead, one person would take the spoon and use it to feed another. They in turn would use the spoon to return the favor. The guide turned to the man and said, "This is your place. This is your church. These are your people."

Five years ago, this church, in many ways, looked very much like it does today -- the building was still old; much of the maintenance was still deferred for the future resources -- or waiting for a catastrophe before we wrapped it all in duct tape from foundation to rafters. Five years ago, we were in worship together just as we are today.

The only difference from what I can tell is that God has other plans for us. God wants us to dream big about the future. God has been holding on, keeping us together, because we are meant for something else.

So let's think of this as our Dream Year. Let's make this a Dream Year. Let's be bold and audacious. Let's offer to God the wildest vision we could have for this church and for our lives. What would that be?

- I dream of a public labyrinth for spiritual growth
- I dream of a thriving children's church every Sunday
- I dream an interfaith network in our community to share prayers and vigils and action
- I dream of a dynamic sanctuary space with movable parts and changing boundaries
- I dream of a robust gratitude program
- I dream of opportunities for faith development and questions
- I dream of an integrated annual planning process

Or go bigger yet:

- I dream of a community action to reduce gun violence
- I dream of blocking the street and having a neighborhood block party
- I dream of serving weekly meals to those who are hungry

I want you to take a cloud and a pencil. I want you to think of one thing or many things. I want you to be inspired and think big. But, here is the kicker – do not write down something you want someone else to do. Write down something you want to participate in. Write down something that is a passion for you; something that fills you and propels you forward.

You see, the dream begins with you. You are the active ingredient. Now write it down.

(Pause)

As the offering plates come around in a few minutes, I invite you to put your dreams, put your cloud into the offering plate. We are going to create a dream wall in the Fireside Room because this is what we do; this is what we will always do.

We build a community of dreams. So we will build a community where each light shines into and breaks the darkness. We will build a community where all gifts are welcomed. Because some days we need comfort from those who have the gift of comfort; some days we need action from those who

have the gift of activism; some days we need faith from those who have the gift of faith; and some days we simply need to be reminded that God has put us here for a reason. And that reason has a lot to do with dreams and visions, with love and hope, with making something good happen in our community.

Amen.